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THE PLAYS OF NOEL COWARD

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NOEL COWARD

FIRST SERIES

SIROCCO

HOME CHAT

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
1928

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Contains three plays by the young English dramatist—Sirocco, Home chat, and The queen was in the parlour. They are dramatic, with short trenchant interchanges of speech—single words or sentences of not more than two or three words—obviously written for the stage but also entertaining to read.

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INTRODUCTION

By Arnold Bennett

NOEL COWARD is a friend of mine. Therefore, in my righteous anxiety to do him no more than justice, I shall perhaps do him less than justice. He is a man of the theatre; he is a young man of the heatre; and he is more comprehensively a man of the heatre than any other human being in London. (I say othing of the New York stage. Marvels may have arisen nce I was there in B. C. 1911.) There are men of the eatre in London who can act, men who can dance, men ho can sing, men (one or two) who can write plays, men ho can write revues, men who can write humorous verse, en who can write for the orchestra, men who can write ngs, men who can write dance music, men who can con- uct a rehearsal, men who can produce a play, men who n produce a revue. Noel Coward can act, dance, sing, rite plays, write revues, write orchestral music, songs, d dance music, conduct a rehearsal, produce a play, oduce a revue. He can do all these things well, and some them very brilliantly indeed. He also writes novels, ough I have not read one yet.

And he is, I believe—but I have not pressed him on the int—under thirty years of age.

His fame and his notoriety are such that he has divided London into two camps, the Ayes and the Noes, both obstreperously vocal on his first-nights. The Ayes applaud every witticism, every dramatic stroke. The Noes miss no opportunity of expressing, with noise, their disapproval. If they see a chance to boo, they boo. Hence the man's first-nights are apt to be quite vivacious affairs. The first-nights might be more tranquil were it not for his courage in facing an audience—nay, his positive desire to face an audience. Consciously or subconsciously he loves a shindy; and in a shindy his bland smile is imperturbable and indestructible. His appearance before the curtain is usually the signal for manifestations, which excite nobody less than the object of them.

Audiences attend with the double purpose of enjoying the play and enjoying the subsequent fun. Some individuals may be disappointed or pretend to be disappointed with the former, but nobody is ever disappointed with the latter. The proof of this last lies in the fact that the demand for first-night seats is increasingly greater than the supply. No London playwright, not even Barrie or Somerset Maugham or Lonsdale or Galsworthy, can bring together a more splendid collection of automobiles on a first-night than Noel Coward.

His celebrity might have spoilt him, but it has not; for he is a serious worker, with the habits of a worker. He has a taste for early hours, and a distaste for the convivial goblet. After a couple of hours of water, just when in the opinion of the artistic temperament an evening is about to begin, he will get up from his chair and say: "I

have a rehearsal to-morrow morning. If you'll excuse me I'll go home." And in thirty seconds he has vanished from the scene.

An interesting question: Why has Noel Coward, with such an irresistibly attractive individuality, aroused such lively opposition in London?

I think that there are three answers to this question. The first is that he writes his plays very quickly. It is said, and possibly with truth, that he writes a play in three days, or in five days, or at the outside in a week. But to my mind the length of time spent by an author over a play is a matter which concerns the author alone. Good plays, even fine plays, signed by other names than Noel Coward's, have been begun and finished in less than a week. And good and fine plays have taken six months or two years. Different authors work in different ways. An author is entitled to announce: "Here is my play. Judge it. The time I gave to it, like the manner in which I lace my shoes, is my business and nobody else's."

In Noel Coward's place, aware as I am of the wanton irrationality of the theatre public, aware that critics—being human despite all appearances to the contrary—are bound to argue that a job done with marvellous celerity is a job botched, I would have uttered no syllable about speed. I would have kept my rate of composition a mystery. But Noel Coward, boyishly ingenuous, and perhaps a bit dazed by his own rapidity, "let on." An indiscretion that had to be paid for! The price, however, is trifling.

In some of his plays I have noticed what I deem to be loose ends, which may or may not be attributable to the

rate of composition. Not in his best plays. There is no sign of haste in, for instance, *The Queen Was in the Parlour*. It may have been the product of three years of concentrated labour. If it was written in three hours I don't care; for I have no desire to intrude upon the wholly irrelevant privacies of the study. I seek no evidences of good or evil beyond those furnished by the play itself.

The second reason for the opposition to Noel Coward is his success. He has had startling failures—I myself have assisted at two in less than a fortnight—but speaking broadly his success has been tremendous. And withal he has committed the sin of being very young. The critical public, and especially the professional critics, have an objection to so much success attained so young. They say to themselves, and to others: "Look here! This will never do. There are limits, and this bright lad has exceeded them. He must be put in his place. It is not sufficient for us to be critical. We must be hypercritical—at any price. After all, we are old enough to be the fellow's father." And so on. Well, the attitude is human, but it is not sense. And it can have absolutely no permanent result. To be frank, an obscure jealousy is at the bottom of it. Hence it flatters, instead of engendering humility.

The third reason for the opposition to Noel Coward is his choice of subjects. It may fairly be said that for the most part the Cowardian characters are a sad lot, pert, cynical, orgiastic, and sexually vicious. Even in his milder works—for instance, *Hay Fever*—the people behave with an astounding and fundamental incivility. Nobody can deny that such characters are typical of certain strata of

London society, and Noel Coward has gone to those strata for his material.

I have used the word "choice" but loosely. An artist does not in fact choose his material. The material which he employs appeals to the creative instinct in him. He accepts it, because he must. Futile to tell him that he ought to choose other material! In practice he cannot. And he cannot explain why he cannot.

He may say that he sees life like that, and further that life notoriously *is* like that. But the last thing desired by large sections of the public is that a play should resemble life. They specifically wish for plays that do not resemble life. And if a play does resemble life they immediately fall on it for not being "nice." They demand from playwrights a consistent policy of Hush-hush—let's pretend. A scene such as the second act of *Fallen Angels*, in which two well-dressed young women gradually get drunk and more drunk and still more drunk, until they are completely drunk, infuriates them. They call it an "outrage on womanhood," despite the inescapable fact that young women in various stages of drunkenness are a not uncommon sight in genteel circles where dress counts for more than decorum. The second act of *Fallen Angels* is not a good act, simply because it has no dramatic content. But the Hush-hush enthusiasts did not attack it on that ground at all.

The Hush-hush enthusiasts have been led by a few critics of whom the sharpest is Hannen Swaffer. Swaffer is a very good journalist, a composite of the late Alan Dale (an Englishman) and the existing G. Jean Nathan. His lashings of the methods and the fatuities of the London

stage considered as an institution have been satisfactory in their effect, if crude and coarse in their style. I mention him merely as a standard bearer of Hush-hush, the strident mouthpiece of the Hush-hushites.

I often wonder what he and his cohorts would say about the world's greatest play, *Hamlet*, if they could witness it for the first time and as the work of an unknown writer, with its "incestuous sheets," its snobbishness, its vacillating and stultified hero, its lunatic heroine, and its large general resort to assassination. The most vilified plays of Noel Coward are sweetness and light compared to the plays of the supreme dramatists, from the Greek tragedians down to Ibsen and Henri Becque.

Naturally Noel Coward might have avoided opposition, had he not been guilty of a further and a graver sin. His youth and success, his speed and his subjects would have been forgiven; but he has refused to be sentimental; and to be unsentimental is the unforgivable sin on the fashionable stage. You can choose and use with safety any subject on earth if you will sentimentalize it. I doubt whether any Hush-hushite has yet objected to the subject of *The Merry Widow*, a piece built exclusively out of wantons, drunkards and debauchees of the most repulsive kind, but rendered palatable to Hush-hushites by an inordinate plastering of gross sentimentality. If Noel Coward had dramatized the story of *The Merry Widow*, there would have been the devil to pay.

He is a master of natural dialogue, he is witty, he is humorous, he is a good constructor, he is full of resource, he is sometimes very powerful, he is nearly always true.

But he is never sentimental. At any rate, I can recall no sentimentality of his. That he should have achieved so much success without debasing himself by indulgence in sentimentality is the best argument for his authenticity as a dramatist. Unsentimentality always thrives on opposition. And Noel Coward thrives. No final judgment can be passed upon him. I insist on regarding him as still a beginner. I admire the soundness and brilliance and originality of what he has already done; but I expect to admire vastly more the qualities of the work which he is appointed to accomplish in the next ten or fifteen years.

SIROCCO

TO

MRS. ASTLEY COOPER

CHARACTERS

Lucy Griffin
Stephen Griffin
Mrs. Griffin
The Reverend Sampson Crutch
Francine Trott
Mrs. Breeze
Miss Johnson
Gianetta
Pietro
Giulia
Tonio
Maria
Giuseppe
Waiter
Sirio Marson
Various Revellers at the Festa, &c.

SCENES

Act I: Scene. *The Moorish Room of the Palace Hotel, Bellagualia, Northern Italy.*
Act II: Scene I. *The Combattente Club, Bellagualia.*
Scene II. *The same. An hour or so later.*
Act III: Scene. *Sirio Marson's Studio in Florence. A week later.*
Time: *The Present.*

'Sirocco' was first performed in England at Daly's Theatre on November 24, 1927, with the following cast:

LUCY GRIFFIN	FRANCES DOBLE
STEPHEN GRIFFIN	DAVID HAWTHORNE
MRS. GRIFFIN	HELEN FERRERS
REV. SAMPSON CRUTCH	AUBREY MATHER
FRANCINE TROTT	BLYTH DALY
MRS. BREEZE	MARGARET WATSON
MISS JOHNSON	ADA KING
GIANETTA	DORIS GARRICK
PIETRO	TONY DE LUNGO
GIULIA	MARJORIE GABAIN
TONIO	ARTURO GOMEZ
MARIA	ELIZABETH VAUGHAN
GIUSEPPE	GEORGE COULOURIS
SIRIO	IVOR NOVELLO

The play produced by BASIL DEAN.

ACT I

SCENE: *The Scene is the Moorish room in the Palace Hotel, Bellagualia, Northern Italy.*
It is an unattractive room with a good many inlaid tables and chairs with carved backs and seats. There are a few framed reproductions of Victorian engravings on the walls. There are French windows standing open; they lead on to a white terrace boasting a few dusty palms, beyond which can be seen the very deep blue sea.

When the curtain rises MRS. BREEZE, *a large, grey woman of about forty-five, is alternately sipping coffee and crocheting a dark green woollen jumper.* MISS JOHNSON, *a faded, watery-eyed creature, is checking off the titles of likely books in a library catalogue.*

MRS. BREEZE: It wasn't only because she was a Catholic that I disliked her, after all there are some very nice, pleasant Catholics; I'm quite broad-minded enough to admit that, but somehow——

MISS JOHNSON: I quite understand, Mrs. Breeze, it's your nature. I'm like that too, everything must be above board with me.

MRS. B.: But I had my answer ready. I just gave her a look and said, 'Mrs. Fogerty, maybe you're right and maybe you're not,' and I turned and walked straight out of the room.

Miss J.: I wish I had your presence of mind. I always lose my temper, you know, and flare up.

Mrs. B.: Well, my experience of the world has taught me one thing.

Miss J.: What's that?

Mrs. B.: Never to show my feelings unless it's absolutely necessary, and even then with discretion.

Miss J.: How wise—how very wise—especially in these days when poise is so rare.

Mrs. B.: It's having travelled so much, you know, it enlarges the outlook.

Miss J.: Quite. (*There is a slight pause.*) By the way, have you read 'The Passionate Moment,' by Edgar Sheepmeadow? It's marked down here.

Mrs. B.: Let me see now—he's the man who wrote all that historical stuff, isn't he? No, I haven't.

Miss J.: Such a moving picture of Mary Queen of Scots. I cried my eyes out.

Mrs. B. (*patronisingly*): I always liked Mary Queen of Scots. (*Thoughtfully.*) I'm not sure whether to have a fancy border round this or keep it plain like the last one? (*She holds up her crochet.*)

Miss J.: It's wonderful the way you're always working at something. I couldn't, you know. I suppose it's because I'm such a great reader. Oh dear, how hot it is!

Mrs. B.: I pity poor Mr. Griffin spending all day in a stuffy train.

Miss J.: He's going by the two-thirty, isn't he?

Mrs. B.: Yes. Mr. Griffin told me that Lucy wanted to go with him.

MISS J.: I wonder why he doesn't take her!

MRS. B.: Wives can't always be tied to their husbands' apron strings. I expect she'd be in the way. I understand he has a lot of business to do in Tunis.

MISS J.: What a wonderful place it must be. You've been there, haven't you?

MRS. B.: Yes; it's flat—very flat.

MISS J.: I don't suppose he'll mind that. Men are much more adaptable than women.

MRS. B.: There I disagree with you.

MISS J.: Oh!

MRS. B.: People are always saying things like that, but they're not true.

MISS J. (*faintly flustered*): Oh well—I'm sure I only——

MRS. B.: It doesn't matter.

Enter MRS. GRIFFIN. *She is a grey-haired, rather aggressive-looking woman; she wears good but badly chosen clothes and several brooches.*

MRS. GRIFFIN (*firmly*): It's my belief that this is the hottest day we've had so far.

MISS J.: Real Riviera weather.

MRS. B.: So tiresome that your son should be leaving just as it's getting nice.

MISS J.: Poor Lucy must be very cut up.

MRS. G.: Yes, she is; she has a great deal of reserve, you know—sometimes I think that must make it worse.

MRS. B.: She looked very peaky at lunch I thought.

MRS. G.: This is the first time since their marriage that they will have been parted for longer than a week.

MISS J.: It seems a shame. They *are* so happy together.

Mrs. G.: It's unavoidable, I'm afraid. My son has been putting off this trip for ages, but now it's essential that he should go.

Mrs. B.: It's oil, isn't it?

Mrs. G.: Yes—oil, oil—like his uncle and Robert, my late husband—all oil.

Miss J.: Your son thinks it wiser to leave Lucy here than to take her with him?

Mrs. G.: Oh yes, much wiser—you see his business necessitates such concentration—not that other men would think so perhaps, but that's Stephen all over—once he is interested in a thing he just slogs away at it. I often say he'll have a bad breakdown one of these days. (*She laughs hilariously at the thought.*)

Miss J.: How strong of him to be able to refuse when they're so devoted to one another.

Mrs. G.: It's only for six weeks.

Mrs. B.: I fear she will have to put up with our poor society. (*She laughs.*)

Mrs. G.: Lucy is a dear girl. We're all so fond of her, she's so reliable and yet so utterly dependent upon Stephen for her happiness; it's quite pathetic now and then to see the way she looks at him.

Miss J.: Yes, I know, I know. I've noticed that too.

Mrs. G.: She hasn't had much affection and love in her life hitherto—no father and mother—so sad!

Mrs. B.: We must all be particularly nice to her. Can't we think of something jolly to do?

Miss J.: We might arrange a picnic.

MRS. G.: She's going to play tennis with the Chalmers half-past four—they've been so kind!

MISS J.: Such ladylike girls.

Enter FRANCINE TROTT. *The adjective 'vivacious' describes her mercilessly.*

FRANCINE: Mrs. Griffin, I've been looking for you everywhere. Where's Lucy?

MRS. G.: Upstairs with Stephen.

FRANCINE: I've got the most thrilling news. There's going to be a Festa on Thursday night.

MRS. B.: Where?

FRANCINE: At the Combattente Club. Mr. Crutch told me about it. It's in aid of something or other.

MISS J.: How fortunate. It will be something to cheer Lucy up.

FRANCINE: Yes, won't it. Poor Lucy—looking so blue, and I don't wonder. Your big, tall son going away, Mrs. Griffin. I shall cry, I know I shall.

MRS. B. (*with a roguish laugh*): What will Lucy say?

FRANCINE: Do you know it's only my terrific friendship with her that keeps me from just flinging my arms round his neck. There, now I've said it, but you understand, don't you, Mrs. Griffin? (*She slips her arm affectionately through* MRS. GRIFFIN'S.)

MRS. G. (*smiling complacently*): Ridiculous girl!

FRANCINE: I think he's just wonderful.

MRS. G.: You'll be making me quite vain, you know—saying such nice things about my son.

FRANCINE: I can't help it. I'm not reserved like all of

you. I just have to say exactly what I think straight out.

MISS J. (*eagerly*): I'm like that too.

FRANCINE: He's so protective and strong.

MRS. G.: Francine, really!

FRANCINE: Oh, but he *is*—just a typical Englishman, that's what he is—typical.

Enter LUCY GRIFFIN. *She is extremely nice-looking, her clothes are good but not smart. Her age might be anything between twenty-three and thirty.*

MRS. G. (*obviously*): There you are, dear.

LUCY: Yes, here I am.

MRS. B.: What time do you start for the station?

LUCY: In about half an hour.

MISS J.: If I were you I'd go and lie down for a bit after seeing your husband off.

MRS. G.: Yes, do dear—it will rest your nerves.

LUCY: I don't think I could. I never do sleep in the middle of the day.

MRS. B.: Have you started that new jumper yet?

LUCY (*listlessly*): No.

MRS. B.: Well, if *I* were you I'd start it this afternoon. You've got the silk and everything.

LUCY: Oh yes—I've got the silk.

FRANCINE: I think that blue is just the most adorable colour that ever happened—like the sea and the sky all mixed up—divine!

LUCY: It *is* pretty.

MRS. B.: You could sit on the terrace, it's quite shady.

MRS. G.: Or in here.

LUCY (*suddenly*): I don't want to start a jumper.

MRS. G. (*raising her eyebrows slightly at her tone*): Very well, dear.

LUCY: I don't want to plan anything to do. I hate having everything mapped out. I want just *not* to know what's going to happen next—for once.

Everyone exchanges glances.

MRS. G. (*Patting* LUCY's *shoulders*): Poor child, you're all on edge and no wonder. Is Stephen upstairs?

LUCY: Yes. He'll be down in a minute.

MRS. G.: I shall go on to the terrace, it's cooler. (*Meaningly.*) Are you coming, Mrs. Breeze?

MRS. B.: Yes, yes, I think I will.

MRS. G. (*kissing* LUCY's *cheek*): Cheer up, dear—tell Stephen to come and say good-bye out there.

She goes out, followed by MRS. BREEZE.

MISS J.: I'm going to have a snooze—just a teeny one, then I think I shall go and change my book.

FRANCINE: You can't to-day, it's Tuesday, the library's shut.

MISS J.: So it is. How annoying, but still poor Miss Hepworth—I suppose she must have a holiday sometimes. I shall go to-morrow. (*She goes out.*)

LUCY *sinks into a chair.*

LUCY: Oh, dear!

FRANCINE: Poor Lucy!

LUCY: I wish I were going with Stephen.

FRANCINE: I expect he wishes that too.

LUCY: He could quite easily take me if he wanted to.

FRANCINE: Lucy, you *know* he would if he could.

LUCY: I don't know anything of the sort.

FRANCINE (*shocked*): Lucy!

LUCY: I shouldn't be in the way a bit; I can look after myself.

FRANCINE: It isn't that, I'm sure; there's his work; think of his work.

LUCY: I do—often.

FRANCINE: It must be wonderful to be so much in love.

LUCY: Yes, I suppose it is.

FRANCINE: Suppose?

LUCY: I've been married three years, you know.

FRANCINE: And you can't bear Stephen to go out of your sight—if that isn't love, I'd like to know what is.

LUCY: So should I.

FRANCINE: What on earth do you mean?

LUCY: I don't know. I don't think I mean anything—ever.

FRANCINE: You're very strange to-day, but I suppose it's quite natural.

LUCY: Quite natural.

FRANCINE: We must all exert ourselves to keep you from being too terribly lonely when he's gone.

LUCY: I shan't be lonely, but—but there's nothing much to do, is there?

FRANCINE: We'll just *make* things to do. There's a Festa on Thursday night at the Combattente, you know.

LUCY: Festa?

FRANCINE: Yes—too perfectly heavenly for words—all the villagers in fancy dress, and they throw confetti.

LUCY: I see.

FRANCINE: Of course *we* don't go in fancy dress—rather *infra dig.*, Mr. Crutch says.

LUCY: Is he going?

FRANCINE: Yes, he knows the Italians inside out, you know.

LUCY: How nice!

FRANCINE: I never knew a clergyman with such a cute sense of humour. He said he'd have to keep his eye on me or else I'd be eloping with the good-looking baker's boy. (*She goes into gales of laughter.*)

LUCY: I hate Mr. Crutch.

FRANCINE: Lucy!

LUCY: I think he's pompous and stupid; he makes me feel shy.

FRANCINE: How *can* you!

LUCY: I hate everybody to-day, anyhow.

FRANCINE (*with deep sympathy*): I understand.

LUCY: No, you don't, Francine. You don't understand anything.

FRANCINE: There's no need to be rude just because you're upset at Stephen going.

LUCY: I'm *not* upset at Stephen going.

FRANCINE (*horrified*): What *do* you mean?

LUCY: I'm upset because I'm not going.

FRANCINE (*relieved*): It's the same thing really.

LUCY: No, it isn't.

FRANCINE: Well, of course if you're going on contradicting every word I say——

LUCY: Never mind.

FRANCINE: I do mind. It's horrid of you.

LUCY: I am horrid though, hadn't you realised that before?

FRANCINE: Not until to-day.

LUCY: I'm sorry, Francine, but I'm irritable, bad-tempered, discontented and bored.

FRANCINE: Well, there's no need to vent it on me.

LUCY: I shouldn't if you weren't here.

FRANCINE: I shall go if you talk like that.

LUCY: That's what I want you to do.

FRANCINE (*affronted*): Really, Lucy!

LUCY (*impulsively*): Please forgive me, and don't be cross.

FRANCINE: I'm not cross, I'm hurt.

LUCY: Don't be hurt either.

FRANCINE: I think you must have gone mad.

LUCY: I wish I had, it must be lovely to be mad just for a little—and know for certain that everything is tremendously important.

FRANCINE: You're talking nonsense.

LUCY: Why shouldn't I?

FRANCINE: Because it's silly.

LUCY: No sillier than sense in the long run.

FRANCINE: What *is* the matter with you?

LUCY: Go away, Francine, you're like a blue-bottle.

FRANCINE: Well, really!

LUCY: The hotter it gets the louder you seem to buzz.

FRANCINE: How dare you!

LUCY (*laughing*): You're buzzing now.

FRANCINE (*outraged*): Oh! (*She goes out.*)

LUCY, *left alone, sighs a little, then sits down, looking extremely unhappy.* SIRIO MARSON *enters from the terrace. He is tall and slim and dark; he is dressed in grey flannel trousers and a white silk shirt.*

SIRIO: Good afternoon.

LUCY (*turning*): Oh!

SIRIO: I hope I do not intrude.

LUCY: Not at all. This is a public room.

SIRIO: I hope, then, I do not disturb you?

LUCY: Not a bit, thank you.

SIRIO: Good! May I sit down?

LUCY: Certainly if you like.

SIRIO: It is very hot.

LUCY: Very!

There is a slight pause.

SIRIO: Even the little dogs on the beach feel how hot it s. They lie with their tongues out.

LUCY: Poor things!

SIRIO: You are fond of dogs? I have a dog; she is very weet.

He goes to the window and calls. A small black spaniel runs in. SIRIO *takes it in his arms.*

LUCY: Oh, what a darling!

SIRIO (*holding it close to her*): She will be friendly.

LUCY (*stroking her*): What's her name?

SIRIO: Mrs. Robinson.

LUCY (*laughing*): Good heavens!

SIRIO: An English lady in Rome gave her to me, so named her after her.

LUCY (*still laughing*): I see.

SIRIO: Why do you laugh so?

LUCY: It's such a ridiculous name for a dog.

SIRIO: She is an English dog, and she is quite satisfied. (*He turns away.*)

LUCY: Please don't be offended.

SIRIO: I am only offended on behalf of Mrs. Robinson.

LUCY (*laughing again*): How absurd!

SIRIO: What is your name, please?

LUCY: Griffin. Mrs. Griffin.

SIRIO (*laughing loudly*): Fantastic!

LUCY: I beg your pardon?

SIRIO: Griffin! Come away, Mrs. Robinson, we are avenged.

LUCY: Where did you learn to speak English?

SIRIO: My father was English.

LUCY: Oh I see.

SIRIO: He was a very clever man, but lazy, you understand—he waited always for his rich aunt to die, but she did not, and the more he waited the more he drank and then *he* died.

LUCY (*slightly embarrassed*): How sad!

SIRIO: Yes, it was very sad.

There is a pause.

LUCY (*with an effort*): And your mother?

SIRIO: She lives in Rome—she married again—my stepfather keeps an hotel, but I do not care for it. It is not a very good hotel.

LUCY: Oh, what a pity.

SIRIO: It doesn't matter. I do not live there, I live in Florence with Mrs. Robinson. We are very happy.

LUCY: I'm so glad.

SIRIO: You will come and see us when you are in Flor-ence?

LUCY (*taken aback*): Well—er—yes, I should be de-ighted.

SIRIO: I am an artist, you know. I paint pictures—sometimes very big ones and sometimes very little ones for the magazines.

LUCY: How interesting!

SIRIO: Yes, it is very interesting.

LUCY: Is that why you are here—to paint?

SIRIO: No, no. I am here *en vacance*—I stay with my uncle, he has a large villa on the hill; he is very rich. I have been ill.

LUCY: You look very well now.

SIRIO: Yes, I am recovered. I tried to kill myself.

LUCY: What!

SIRIO: I took poison, but it made me sick—terribly sick.

LUCY (*not knowing quite what to say*): Why on earth did you do that?

SIRIO: It is a long story. I loved someone very much, and my great friend Lorenzo, whom you will surely meet when you come to Florence—he loved her too, and they went away both of them, and my heart broke, and life was very black, so I said, 'Phut! what is the use'—I was mad, you understand—I will tell you all about it one day.

LUCY (*bewildered*): I hope you feel all right now.

SIRIO: Oh yes, it is all over—I am very well.

LUCY: That's splendid, isn't it?—I mean, to be able to get over anything like that so quickly.

SIRIO: You are very *simpatica.*

LUCY: Am I?

SIRIO: I have seen you before in the Corso with a fat man.

LUCY: That is my husband, and he isn't fat.

SIRIO: Well, he is big then.

LUCY: Yes, he is.

SIRIO: I have seen you driving too—along by the sea in a red hat.

LUCY: Yes, I have a red hat.

SIRIO: Mrs. Robinson saw you also; she was very impressed.

LUCY (*laughing*): How ridiculous you are.

SIRIO: I am very sincere.

LUCY: I doubt that.

SIRIO: And very sensitive.

LUCY: Why did you come here, anyhow—you're not living in the hotel?

SIRIO: I came to see you.

LUCY: Nonsense! You didn't know I was here.

SIRIO: I felt it in my bones.

LUCY: I don't even know your name.

SIRIO: Sirio.

LUCY: Is that your surname?

SIRIO: No—Marson is my surname, but you will please call me Sirio.

LUCY: I shall do no such thing.

SIRIO: You are unfriendly.

LUCY: No, I'm not, but I don't call strangers by their Christian names.

SIRIO: I am no stranger now. I have told you all about myself and my mother, and my father and my friend Lorenzo, and my happiness and my despair; you know me intimately, we are old friends.

LUCY: You forget you know nothing about me at all.

SIRIO: I know everything about you.

LUCY (*stiffly*): Indeed!

SIRIO: You are very beautiful and very quiet and very self-conscious, and your husband is very big, and you have a red hat.

LUCY: I'm not in the least beautiful or self-conscious, and I consider you very impertinent.

SIRIO: Now you are angry.

LUCY: No, I'm not, I'm merely surprised.

SIRIO: Please forgive me.

LUCY (*rising*): There is nothing to forgive.

SIRIO: Are you going now?

LUCY: Yes.

SIRIO: Good-bye.

LUCY: Good-bye. (*She goes out, left.*)

SIRIO, *left alone, lights a cigarette and smiles gaily.* FRANCINE *enters from left.*

FRANCINE: Oh, I didn't know anyone was here.

SIRIO (*politely*): Good afternoon.

FRANCINE: Good afternoon.

SIRIO: My name is Sirio Marson. I have brought tickets to sell for the Festa.

FRANCINE: How too perfectly thrilling.

SIRIO: You will come?

FRANCINE: Of course, I'd adore to. What a darling dog!

SIRIO: The tickets are twenty-five lire each.

FRANCINE: What's his name?

SIRIO: I will not tell you if you don't mind—it is a secret.

FRANCINE: Oh, I see.

SIRIO: Will you have a cigarette? (*He hands her a packet.*)

FRANCINE: Thanks ever so much. (*Confidentially.*) I smoke too much, you know.

SIRIO (*lighting her cigarette*): So do I—I think I talk too much too.

FRANCINE: There now; we're well matched, I'm afraid.

They both laugh—he a trifle cynically, she with whole-hearted amusement.

SIRIO: You wish for the tickets?

FRANCINE: Oh, we're all coming in a party with Mr. Crutch.

SIRIO: The English parson?

FRANCINE: Don't you like him?

SIRIO: I think he is a very jolly man.

FRANCINE: He says the most killing things. I don't think clergymen ought to have senses of humour, do you?

SIRIO: It must make life very much more difficult for them.

FRANCINE: He says it would be much better for us not to put on fancy dress, because it would be *infra dig.* Oh, I am sorry—I mean——

SIRIO (*relentlessly*): Why?

FRANCINE (*dreadfully flustered by her own tactlessness*): Oh, I don't know—only——

SIRIO (*smiling*): It is true. The English look very foolish n fancy dress.

FRANCINE: I'm American, you know.

SIRIO (*drily*): Of course. You should come as Columbine —you are so light and gay!

FRANCINE: Oh, Mr. Marson!

SIRIO: It is a pity so many English are coming really— hey are rather depressing.

FRANCINE: Oh, you are the most devastatingly outpoken man I've ever met.

SIRIO: Just because I say the English Colony here are a ttle heavy?

FRANCINE: Why do you sell tickets to them if you find hem so dull?

SIRIO: The Festa is given for charity, you know. I epresent my uncle on the committee, and we have deided to take as much money as possible from the foreigrs, and pray God they leave early.

Enter the REV. SAMPSON CRUTCH. *He is a big man, plump and jocose.*

Mr. C.: Ah, Miss Trott, how are we this afternoon— nd Marson? I think I can guess why you're here. Ah!!

He looks archly at SIRIO, *who responds with a faint smile.*

FRANCINE: He's brought tickets to sell for Thursday.

MR. C.: I thought as much.

SIRIO: I hope you are coming, Mr. Crutch, to help?

MR. C.: I certainly intend to pilot a few of my friends rom this hotel—my particular friends, that is. (*Roguishly*

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to FRANCINE.) Will you avail yourself of my escort, fair lady?

FRANCINE (*giggling*): Oh, Mr. Crutch, you know I'm just simply dying to go.

MR. C.: Very well then, we'll start now, eh?

He crooks his arm and she takes it. Both laugh delightedly. Re-enter MRS. BREEZE *and* MISS JOHNSON *from terrace.*

MRS. B.: What on earth is happening?

MR. C. (*singing noisily to the tune of 'The Campbells are coming'*): 'We're off to the Festa, hurrah, hurrah! We're off to the Festa, hurray, hurray!'

He sits down heavily and mops his brow. FRANCINE *leans against the window convulsed with laughter.* SIRIO *watches with a faintly contemptuous smile.*

FRANCINE: Oh, you are terrible, Mr. Crutch—you really and truly are, you know.

MISS J.: If you're this *now*, Mr. Crutch, what will you be on the night? (*She sniggers.*)

MR. C.: I shall be quite steady enough to keep my eye on you, Miss Johnson. I know you'll need it, eh? Aren't I right, Mrs. Breeze? Look at her blushing.

MISS J.: How can you, Mr. Crutch?

MR. C.: May I present to you a young friend of mine, Sirio Marson. We're of different faiths, but that doesn't matter to us, does it, old chap? (*He hits* SIRIO *heavily on the shoulder.*)

SIRIO (*shuddering slightly*): No, no, not in the least.

MR. C.: Mrs. Breeze—Miss Johnson.

SIRIO (*bowing*): How do you do?

MR. C.: Miss Trott, you know already—now don't eny it. I believe there was an assignation between you oth here this afternoon.

SIRIO (*smiling, but with intense feeling*): I assure you othing was further from my thoughts.

MR. C.: He really came with mercenary designs on s, didn't you, old boy?

SIRIO: Yes, I want to sell you all tickets for the Festa.

MRS. B.: How much are they?

SIRIO: Twenty-five lire each.

MISS J.: How expensive! Does that include supper?

SIRIO: I'm afraid not. It is in aid of the orphan children f the men who died in the war—you understand—it is ally deserving.

MRS. B.: Oh, well, with the exchange as it is, I suppose e must afford it.

SIRIO: Thank you.

MRS. B.: I'll take two.

MR. C.: So will I. I'm escorting Miss Trott, you know.

MRS. B.: We pay now?

SIRIO: Yes, please. (*He hands them tickets.*)

MRS. B. (*taking money from her bag*): Ten, fifteen, xteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty—twenty-ne—I haven't any more change.

SIRIO: Some other time will do. (*He bows and turns to .*)

MR. C.: Is that a cocker spaniel you have there?

SIRIO (*puzzled*): No, no—it is a bitch. (*He goes off, ft.*)

MISS J.: Really, these Italians!——

MR. C.: Queer young man that—quite well born, you know, yet he mixes with such a lot of the riff-raff.

FRANCINE: What does he do?

MR. C.: Nothing very much—idle young beggar. It's the mother's fault, lets him run wild too much. She married again.

MISS J.: What a pity!

MR. C.: Very sad—hard on the boy.

FRANCINE: He's just the most picturesque man I've ever seen.

MR. C. (*wagging his finger*): Now, now, now—losing our heart, are we? I can see I shall have my hands full at the Festa.

FRANCINE: Mr. Crutch says we can't wear fancy dress. Isn't it a shame? I wanted to go as Columbine.

MR. C.: Oh no, dear me, no. That would never do. They look up to us, these simple folk. We English are gods to them.

Re-enter LUCY *with* STEPHEN. *He is a good-looking, large-limbed man of about thirty-five.* FRANCINE *snatches the tickets from* MR. CRUTCH'S *hand, and brandishes them.*

FRANCINE: What do you think these are?—tickets for the Festa! Isn't it divine?—a young man came and sold them to us. He's dark and Italian, and gorgeously romantic, and he runs wild and mixes with the villagers. Mr. Crutch is taking me; isn't it just sweet of him? I'm thrilled to the marrow. You must cheer up and forget all about Stephen going away, and I don't mind a bit about you being cross just now, because I quite understand. I'm

ing to change now, but I'll be down in about half an our to fetch you for tennis. Good-bye, Stephen. Good-ye, Mr. Crutch. I'm just too excited to breathe!

She goes out.

MR. C. (*rubbing his hands*): A very bright and enter-ining young lady—full of larks!

MRS. B. (*to* STEPHEN): I'm glad we got one more glimpse f you before you went. Good-bye, safe journey. (*She akes his hand.*)

STEPHEN: Thanks, Mrs. Breeze. Good-bye.

MISS J.: *Bon voyage!* We'll all look after dear Lucy ntil you return.

STEPHEN: You're very kind.

MISS J.: We're all going to have a picnic or something -morrow to cheer her up. Good-bye!

She shakes hands warmly and goes out with MRS. BREEZE.

MR. C.: Good-bye, Griffin, old chap. (*To* LUCY.) He ust look out for those little Eastern ladies, mustn't he?

LUCY: Yes, he must.

MR. C.: You must brighten up and be a merry grass idow, eh?

LUCY: Am I so very depressing?

MR. C. (*hurriedly*): Not at all, not at all. I quite sym-athise. Good-bye, good-bye. (*He goes out on to the terrace.*)

STEPHEN: Where's mother?

LUCY: On the terrace. She wants you to say good-ye to her there. You'd better hurry.

STEPHEN: There's loads of time. The train doesn't o for half an hour. Isn't she coming to the station?

LUCY: No, I think she felt we'd rather be alone.

STEPHEN: Dear old mother! (*He goes towards the terrace.*)

LUCY: Stephen!

STEPHEN: Yes.

LUCY: I want to talk to you for a moment.

STEPHEN: Fire away!

LUCY: I want you to miss this train and go by the next one and take me with you.

STEPHEN: Now then, old girl, don't start that all over again.

LUCY: I'm sorry, but I mean it—terribly.

STEPHEN: I've told you 'no,' Lucy, several times.

LUCY (*eagerly*): Say 'yes' then, once. Oh, you're always so firm—be weak, just a little weak, for a change. I want to come so frightfully.

STEPHEN: I've given the matter a lot of thought—you know that. I hate leaving you.

LUCY: Well, why do you then?

STEPHEN: Because it's impossible for me to take you with me.

LUCY: Yes, but why—why?

STEPHEN: Now look here, my dear——

LUCY: It wouldn't be impossible at all if you really wanted to.

STEPHEN: I've told you my reasons.

LUCY: They're not reasons—real reasons.

STEPHEN: You don't understand.

LUCY (*turning away*): No—I don't.

STEPHEN: You'd have to be alone all day.

LUCY: I shouldn't mind.

STEPHEN: You'd have to mix with a very assorted crowd
t the hotel.

LUCY: I can take care of myself—if I'm happy and
ontented.

STEPHEN: I don't want to risk it.

LUCY: There'd be things to see—new and interesting.

STEPHEN: You couldn't go about everywhere by your-
lf.

LUCY: How absurd! Why not?

STEPHEN: Because it's different. It's not like here, where
verybody's English, and——

LUCY: Dull!

STEPHEN (*offended*): I'm sorry you find my mother dull.

LUCY: Oh, it's not your mother—particularly.

STEPHEN (*haughtily*): Thank you.

LUCY: Can't you see what I mean! If it were England I
ouldn't mind so much, one knows more people and
n ask them to stay or go and stay with them, but here
e's stuck—stuck! The only one of my own age at all is
rancine.

STEPHEN: I understood that she was one of your greatest
iends.

LUCY (*vehemently*): She's a makeshift, that's all.

STEPHEN: Lucy, how can you—have you had a quarrel
ith her?

LUCY: No, I haven't quarrelled with anyone. I'm trying
explain how very much I want to be with you—to go
another place. The weather's lovely here, and the sea's
ue, and the villages and mountains are wonderfully
cturesque, but I'd give my soul for an earthquake—

just to change it all round for a bit. I'm sick to death of it and bored stiff!

STEPHEN: I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Lucy.

LUCY: Well, I'm not.

STEPHEN: You've never behaved like this before.

LUCY: No, I've been waiting.

STEPHEN: Waiting—what for?

LUCY: For something to happen.

STEPHEN: What on earth are you talking about?

LUCY: Can't you see?

STEPHEN: No, I must say I can't.

LUCY (*turning away*): We've been married three years, and life seems to be over.

STEPHEN (*horrified*): Lucy!

LUCY: We have no children.

STEPHEN: That's not my fault.

LUCY: It isn't even mine. It's just luck.

STEPHEN: I thought you were happy.

LUCY: Why?

STEPHEN: Well, aren't you?

LUCY: I ask you—why should I be?

STEPHEN: You've got a husband who loves you.

LUCY: Do you love me, Stephen?

STEPHEN: Of course I do. Why do you think I married you?

LUCY: That was three years ago.

STEPHEN: You imagine I don't love you any more?

LUCY: I think you're fond of me, but only in your spare time.

STEPHEN: Lucy!

LUCY: It's true.

STEPHEN: It's nothing of the sort.

LUCY: Take me away with you then.

STEPHEN: I say, old girl, isn't it rather selfish of you o spring all this on me at the last moment? You know ow dreadfully it worries me to think you're unhappy. hate leaving you, I simply hate it.

LUCY: It isn't so much your leaving me, I wouldn't ven mind that so much if only——

STEPHEN: If only what?

LUCY: You're much older than I am I know, but do wish sometimes you'd discuss things with me a little nore and——

STEPHEN: What sort of things?

LUCY: Things that matter—your business worries, and —well, anything that would sort of draw me into your life. mean your working, every-day life—I seem so remote rom it.

STEPHEN: Are you insinuating that I've neglected you?

LUCY: No, no—not neglected, but—but I don't matter o you very much, do I?

STEPHEN: You're very unreasonable.

LUCY: I'm young still—and I'm scared.

STEPHEN: Scared?

LUCY: Yes, that's what it is—I'm frightened.

STEPHEN: I don't understand.

LUCY: I know you don't, but please try—try hard.

STEPHEN: What are you frightened of?

LUCY: Something getting hold of me.

STEPHEN: Are you ill?

LUCY: No, I'm well—flourishingly well.

STEPHEN: What could get hold of you?

LUCY (*almost wildly*): Can't you see it at all? Can't you imagine anything just beyond what you're accustomed to—something different? I can, and I tell you I'm frightened, so take me away with you.

STEPHEN: No, Lucy—you mustn't be childish.

LUCY (*quietly*): Very well.

STEPHEN (*realising with manly intuition that she wants to be made a fuss of*): Silly, silly little girl! (*He takes her in his arms.*) You matter more to me than——

LUCY: Oil?

STEPHEN: Men must work, you know.

LUCY: Go on, say the rest of it.

STEPHEN: And women must weep.

LUCY: I don't think I'm going to weep though, I'm too angry.

STEPHEN (*still mollifying*): Now now——

LUCY: Do you realise what the life here is going to be for me after you've gone—not that it's been wildly exciting up to now.

STEPHEN (*laughing forcedly*): Here, I say!

LUCY: Playing inferior tennis, knitting jumpers and changing library books—all with people old enough to be my grandmothers.

STEPHEN: I don't think the Misses Chalmers would like to hear you say that.

LUCY: You won't see what I mean, will you? You just won't—you think it's all hysteria and suppressed emotion

because you're leaving me. You think I shall soon get over it when you've gone, don't you? Don't you?

STEPHEN: You really will, you know.

LUCY (*suddenly calming down and looking at him*): Yes yes, I suppose I shall.

STEPHEN: That's my sensible little matey. Do you remember the first time I called you matey?

LUCY: Yes, I do.

STEPHEN: On our honeymoon.

LUCY: Yes.

STEPHEN: At the Crown Hotel, Ilfracombe.

LUCY: Yes.

STEPHEN: How we laughed together, didn't we?

LUCY: Yes.

STEPHEN: No more tears now.

LUCY: There haven't been any tears.

STEPHEN: Almost!

LUCY: I'm sorry I've been horrid, Stephen, just at the last—to worry you.

STEPHEN: My dear! (*He kisses her firmly, and goes on to the terrace and calls.*) Mother!

LUCY, *left alone, goes to a looking-glass let into a Moorish overmantel down right and regards herself pensively.* SIRIO *re-enters from left*—LUCY *sees him in the glass, but doesn't turn.*

SIRIO: Mrs. Griffin.

LUCY (*turning*): Yes?

SIRIO: Will you buy a ticket for the Festa?

LUCY: Not now, thank you.

SIRIO: You are not coming?

LUCY: No. I don't think so.

SIRIO: Why not?

LUCY: I don't like crowds.

SIRIO: This will be different—a gay, happy crowd. Fancy dress—you understand. I shall wear fancy dress.

LUCY (*turning away*): Really——

SIRIO: Why do you turn away when I speak to you? It is very rude.

LUCY: I beg your pardon. (*She turns and looks him full in the eye.*)

SIRIO: That is much nicer. See, I will stare at you without blinking—if you blink first you give me a lira, if I blink first I give you a lira. Capisce?

LUCY *bites her lip and stares at him as contemptuously as she can.* STEPHEN *re-enters.*

STEPHEN: Lucy—are you ready?

LUCY: Quite.

STEPHEN (*to* SIRIO): Good afternoon.

SIRIO (*bowing*): Signor.

STEPHEN *and* LUCY *go out.* SIRIO *follows them with his eyes and smiles.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene I

The scene is the Combattente Club, Bellagualia. It is a sort of anteroom to the dancing-room. There is a curtained opening up right, showing a wide expanse of chalked floor and chairs ranged round the walls. Left, the bar counter runs all the length of the wall, and up at the end of the counter is the door to the street. There are two imposing oleographs of the King and Queen of Italy on the right wall, and several of Mussolini. Their cheap wooden frames are stuck with flags. There are lots of coloured paper decorations festooned across the ceiling.

When the curtain rises, about a dozen orderly couples can be seen revolving in the dancing-room to the strains of a mechanical piano. Rows of people, mostly elderly, can be seen seated round the walls. On the stage there are a few young men and women clustered round the bar.

Miss Johnson *and* Mrs. Breeze *are seated at one of the small tables, right, consuming cakes and lemonade.* Miss Johnson *is wearing what might technically be described as a 'semi.'* Mrs. Breeze *is in a tea-gown, voluptuous in line but untempting in material and colour.*

MISS J.: It's very stuffy here, isn't it?

MRS. B.: What can you expect with all these people—I do hope we shan't catch anything.

MISS J.: I suppose it's all very interesting and picturesque. I have a slight headache, though—I must go soon.

MRS. B.: I think I have some aspirin in my bag. I always carry it for my neuralgia. Would you like some?

MISS J.: Oh no, thank you—a cousin of mine once had a fearful heart attack after taking aspirin.

MRS. B.: Did she get over it?

MISS J.: Yes, but it was terrible while it lasted.

MRS. B.: Look at that man over there—very typical, isn't he?

MISS J. (*looking over the top of her pince-nez*): I think he has a most evil face. (*She puts her hand to her throat.*) I'm always so afraid someone will steal my cameo brooch. It was given me by my dear dead sister.

MRS. B.: The one that died here?

MISS J.: Yes, galloping consumption, you know.

MRS. B. (*with relish*): One of my greatest friends died of consumption.

MISS J.: You must come up one day and see dear Flo's grave. I try to keep it pretty and gay with flowers.

MRS. B.: I'd love to.

MISS J. (*leaning forward confidentially*): She had to be buried very quickly, you know.

MRS. B.: The climate?

MISS J.: Yes.

Enter MR. CRUTCH *with* LUCY. *He is very risky in a*

paper cap. LUCY *looks distinctly charming in a simple blue dinner-frock.*

MR. C. (*breezily*): Well, ladies—enjoying your evening?

MISS J.: Very much, thank you, Mr. Crutch.

MRS. B.: It's all very quaint.

MR. C.: When are you going to give me that dance you promised, Miss Johnson?

MISS J.: I'm afraid I'm no good at these modern dances. I used to be considered a very good waltzer when I was young.

MR. C.: Personally I like a good, old-fashioned polka. (*He catches* LUCY *round the waist and, humming breathily, dances a few steps with her.*) With a fal lal la and a fal lal la and a fal lal la, la, la, la! (*He plants her down at the table next to* MRS. BREEZE *and* MISS JOHNSON.)

MRS. B.: How energetic you always are, Mr. Crutch—how do you manage it?

MR. C.: Early to bed and early to rise, you know! (*He looks archly at* LUCY.) I can see a young lady who is longing for some lemonade—am I right, eh?

LUCY: My throat is rather dry.

MR. C.: I hasten to obey your commands.

He runs over to the bar and laughs chaffingly at some of the Italian boys who regard him with mingled contempt and amusement.

MISS J.: What should we do without Mr. Crutch?

MRS. B.: Are you enjoying yourself, Lucy dear?

LUCY (*without enthusiasm*): Yes, thank you—I expected it to be a little wilder somehow—everybody seems to be behaving very well.

Miss J.: I'm sure I hope they won't do otherwise as long as I'm here.

Lucy: I always thought that at this sort of thing everyone went mad and screamed and generally let themselves go.

Mrs. B.: You've been reading novels, I can see. (*To* Mr. Crutch *as he returns with glasses of bright yellow lemonade.*) Lucy is complaining that it isn't gay enough. She expected everyone to go mad.

Mr. C.: Oh, it may get a little more uproarious later on perhaps, but nothing to speak of. I've been in Italy for several years now, and I've never seen any excesses at all—none at all. Here you are, Mrs. Griffin. (*He hands* Lucy *lemonade.*)

Lucy: Thank you so much. (*She sips it.*)

There is a lot of scuffling and laughter at the bar, then Pietro, *a good-looking young man dressed in rather a tawdry Harlequin costume, detaches himself from the rest and approaches* Miss Johnson.

Pietro (*bowing*): Vous êtes Française, madame?

Miss J.: Oh, dear me—I beg your pardon—mais non—Je suis Anglaise. (*To* Mr. Crutch.) What does he want? Can he speak English?

Mr. C.: No, and very little French probably. (*To* Pietro.) Avanti presto.

Pietro (*ignoring him*): Voulez-vous me donner une danse s'il vous plaît, madame?

Miss J.: Oh, dear—what impertinence. Certainly not! Go away—allons vite.

Pietro (*bowing politely*): Pardon, madame.

He goes back to the bar, where he is greeted with suppressed cheers and more laughter. Money is seen to be handed to him. LUCY *suddenly laughs.*

MRS. B. (*sternly*): Don't let them see you laughing, Lucy, it only encourages them.

FRANCINE *enters breathlessly, she is wearing a pink dress with a wide ribbon in her hair.*

FRANCINE: What do you think? The most thrilling thing—a young man asked me to dance, quite common, but so good-looking. I just couldn't refuse him. (*To* LUCY.) And, my dear, he danced like an angel. There he is, look, quick—dressed as a Pierrot.

MRS. B.: You must be careful, Miss Trott, not to let them take liberties.

FRANCINE: Oh, he'd sooner die—he was just excruciatingly polite all the time.

MR. C.: Yes, your Italian knows how to behave, up to a certain point, you know—very polished.

FRANCINE: I think the Italians are just darlings!

MR. C.: What a pity poor Mrs. Griffin was too ill to come—so disappointing. I had hoped for the honour of dancing with her.

MRS. B.: We were all so sorry. Oh, Miss Johnson, do look at that man, just inside the door, quite a character, isn't he?

MISS J.: Yes, *quite* a character. I noticed him before.

MR. C.: Has anyone seen anything of young Marson?

FRANCINE: Yes, he was dancing just now with that made-up girl from the florist's shop.

MR. C.: Ah, Gianetta—saucy minx. I've told her

so to her face. I always laugh with them, you know—they appreciate it so.

MISS J.: I'm afraid you're a dark horse, Mr. Crutch!

MR. C. (*laughing noisily*): Now, now, now, now, now—ah!

LUCY: What is Mr. Marson dressed in?

FRANCINE: Well, it looked to me just like ordinary pyjamas with a sash round.

MISS J.: How very quaint of him—really there's no knowing what some people will do.

Suddenly GIANETTA *comes in from the dancing-room with* GIUSEPPE, TONIO *and one or two others; they are all talking loudly and look as though they might have a row at any moment.*

GIANETTA: Ti dico di no—Non te lo voglio dire.

GIUSEPPE (*to* TONIO): Va via pidocchioso, vedi bene che è inutile.

TONIO: Ah, maledetto maiale che sei, ti rompo quel sporco naso.

The quarrel continues in a confused undertone, occasional ejaculations being screamed out.

MRS. B.: What were they saying, Mr. Crutch? I can't follow when they speak so quickly.

MISS J.: Neither can I—what was it?

MR. C. (*glancing hurriedly at his watch*): I think perhaps it's time to go now, the best is over.

FRANCINE: Oh, not *yet*, Mr. Crutch.

MR. C.: We've had nearly two hours of it, it's always wiser not to stay too long at this sort of affair—a little undignified.

MISS J. (*rising*): I'm sure we've seen quite enough.

MR. C. (*to* LUCY): Well, silent lady, bedtime at the Zoo, you know. (*He laughs.*)

LUCY (*rising*): Oh, very well.

MISS J.: Come, Mrs. Breeze.

Suddenly SIRIO *comes running in from the dancing-room. He is dressed in green silk pyjamas with a wide and exceedingly vivid orange sash tied round his waist. He has black patent dancing pumps and white socks—a scarlet mask dangles from his wrist. He bows low in front of* LUCY.

SIRIO: One dance, please.

LUCY (*rather coldly*): I'm afraid you're too late, Mr. Marson—we're going now.

SIRIO (*appealingly to everybody*): Please, oh, please wait just five minutes longer—won't you? Finish this one with me, Mrs. Griffin.

LUCY: Really, Mr. Marson, I——

SIRIO: Mr. Crutch—you know everyone here wish you to make a little speech before you go.

MR. C. (*pleased*): Oh, but surely this is neither the time nor the place for speechifying.

SIRIO: Your speeches are not like the speeches of others—they are so gay, so light. You understand?

MR. C.: Well, well, how long will this dance last? I can't keep the ladies waiting.

FRANCINE: Oh, we don't mind. We'd just adore you to make a speech.

SIRIO (*catching* LUCY'S *hand*): Come on.

LUCY: Oh—— (*She hesitates.*) Very well. (*He rushes her off into the dancing-room.*)

Miss J.: What a whirlwind young man.

Mrs. B.: I suppose dear Lucy will be all right with him? We promised Mrs. Griffin that we'd keep an eye on her.

Mr. C.: Oh, quite, quite—perfectly all right, I assure you. They say his grandfather was a Marquis, you know—extremely good family.

Mrs. B. (*artistically half closing her eyes*): It really is a very pretty sight—all those colours—I do wish I could sketch.

Miss J.: My sister—the one who died—sketched beautifully right up to the last.

Francine: Look, there are some vacant chairs by the piano—do let's go in and grab them for Mr. Crutch's oration.

Mr. C. (*laughing complacently*): I'm afraid it won't be quite that, but still——

They all go into the dancing-room talking. Giuseppe *and* Gianetta *leave the bar and follow them.*

Gianetta: Suppongo che quel vecchio stupido sputacchia sopra noi tutti com' è sua abitudine.

Giuseppe: Perchè vuol venire dopo tutto?

Gianetta: Per far ballare la sua grassa pancia. (*They go off.*)

Giuseppe *bangs into* Sirio *as he is re-entering from the dancing-room with* Lucy.

Sirio: Guarda dove vai, bastardo incretinito.

Giuseppe: Un bastardo sei te, figlio d'una cagna.

Sirio (*to* Lucy): Sit down, just for a moment.

Lucy: Why did you suddenly stop dancing?

Sirio: I wanted to talk to you—secretly.

LUCY: Secretly?

SIRIO: It was because you dance so beautifully I stop—a wonderful idea flashed into my mind—phut! like that! (*He snaps his fingers.*)

LUCY: I don't dance beautifully at all. (*She smiles and sits down, right.*)

SIRIO: Like a flower on a long stem—wonderful!

LUCY (*laughing outright*): What nonsense!

SIRIO: Nonsense—no, it is true. I cut my throat here before your eyes if it is not true.

LUCY: You are absurd!

SIRIO: This is my idea—listen! Come back present.

LUCY: How do you mean?

SIRIO: When it gets really exciting. Oh, do come back, I will show you carnival as it really is. You cannot imagine it. I'll look after you—do come!

LUCY: But I can't possibly—what would the others say?

SIRIO: Do not tell them.

LUCY: No—I'm awfully sorry, but I can't.

SIRIO: You could creep out of the hotel. I'll come down and fetch you.

LUCY: Oh no, that would never do. Someone might see.

SIRIO: Well, I will wait here.

LUCY: I can't really.

SIRIO: Yes, you can, you must—it will be glorious. It is hateful with all of them here. They are wet blankets. You should see the difference when they have gone.

LUCY: But I'm English, surely all these people won't like me being here either?

SIRIO: They will not mind you—you are young. It is the silly women that they hate—and Mr. Crutch.

LUCY (*laughing*): Do they hate him?

SIRIO: When they see him in the street they make rude noises, but he does not understand.

LUCY: Oh, how funny! He thinks he's so tremendously popular too.

SIRIO: Listen! He has started his speech.

MR. C. (*in the dancing-room, in bad Italian*): Essere stato molto grande piacere noi tutti, essere presente vostro piccolo ballo questa sera.

Cheers from everyone.

SIRIO: His accent is terrible.

LUCY: I'm not a very good judge, I'm afraid.

SIRIO: You are very good, I am sure. (*He squeezes her arm in a friendly way as they stand on tiptoe to see over the people's heads.*)

MR. C.: Io potere cantare solo una canzone inglese. (*In English.*) 'We won't go home till morning.'

SIRIO: He is a very bright bird, isn't he?

LUCY: Oh, we mustn't laugh at him too—it's so unkind.

MR. C.: Io essere sicuro amici inglesi unirsi con me ringraziare di cuore per una molto allegra serata.

Prolonged cheers.

SIRIO: He is finished. They will all be here in a minute. Will you do what I ask?

LUCY: Come back?

SIRIO: Yes, in an hour—please—you will enjoy it so. We will dance until our heads fall off, eh?

LUCY: All right, I will.

SIRIO: Will I come down for you?

LUCY: Oh, it's only a little way. I'll slip out of the hotel and come along—if anyone sees me I can say I've forgotten my bag, can't I?

SIRIO: Yes, yes—of course you can. That is a promise now?

LUCY: Yes—a promise.

SIRIO: You see—you will love it—I know it.

LUCY: Sssht! Here they are.

SIRIO: In an hour?

LUCY: Yes—an hour.

Re-enter MRS. BREEZE, MISS JOHNSON, FRANCINE, *and* MR. CRUTCH. *The music strikes up again.*

MRS. B. (*to Lucy*): Oh, there you are, we were searching for you among the crowd.

LUCY: We saw and heard splendidly from here.

SIRIO: Beautiful, Mr. Crutch.

MISS J.: I must say I thought it was a very neat little speech.

MRS. B.: We really must go now. Are you ready, Mr. Crutch?

MR. C.: Quite—quite. I hope you haven't been disappointed—the whole thing is typically Italian, isn't it, Marson?

SIRIO: Oh yes, typical.

MR. C.: Good night.

FRANCINE: It was divine—perfectly divine. Good night, Mr. Marson.

MISS J.: A most enjoyable evening.
LUCY: *Most* enjoyable. Good night, Mr. Marson.
SIRIO (*shaking hands*): We shall meet again soon?
LUCY (*smiling*): Quite soon, I hope.

(*They all go out as the curtain falls.*)

SCENE II

is an hour or so later.

hen the curtain rises everything has changed. The scene is the same, but the quiet, orderly behaviour has given place to a wild riot of screaming and dancing. The mechanical piano is going hard. In the dancing-room people can be seen leaping round the floor in groups of four or five; long paper streamers are being hurled backwards and forwards, tangling round everybody's legs and heads and shoulders.

GIANETTA *is standing on the bar clinking two spoons like castanets, occasionally banging* GIUSEPPE *on the head with them as he is sitting just beneath her. Everyone is laughing and talking at once.*

In the centre of the stage a semi-circle of revellers are applauding a very short man dressed as a Russian who is squatting on his haunches and shooting out his legs in time with the music. He finishes up breathlessly and lies on his back—everyone fans him and screams with laughter and approval. TONIO *empties a half-filled glass of champagne over his face; the little man at once leaps up and gives chase, and they both vanish yelling into the dancing-room, most of the crowd following.*

SIRIO *comes dancing in with his arms round the waists of a* GIRL *and a* BOY; *he dances a few very quick*

turns with the Boy. *The street door opens and* Lucy *enters and stands just inside, her plain blue dress looking strangely incongruous next to so many vivid colours. She stares at it all in amazement.* Sirio *doesn't notice her for a few moments; he finishes up his wild dance in front of her.*

Sirio (*breathlessly*): Lucy!

Lucy (*a little startled at being called by her Christian name*): I've come back.

Sirio (*with his arms outstretched to everybody*): She has come back—Signorina Lucy!

Tonio *rushes up and places a very rakish paper cap on* Lucy's *head. She shrinks back as he does so, and then pulls herself together and laughs.*

Lucy: Thank you—Gratzia——

Sirio: That is right, Lucy. You laugh—it is fun, eh?

Lucy (*rather tremulously*): Yes, great fun.

Sirio: You will have some Asti with me here at this little table—come! (*He takes her hand.*)

Lucy: What's that?

Sirio: Sweet champagne—delicious. Sit down. (*Calling loudly.*) Giulia—Giulia!

They both sit down. Giulia *comes across from the bar with a bottle of Asti Spumanti and some sweet cakes.*

Sirio: Sei ubbriaca, Giulia.

Giulia: Oh! Madonna mia, cosa vuoi di meglio ad una festa.

Sirio: Lascia: lo verso io.

Giulia *ambles off.*

LUCY: You were right; it's all very different now.
SIRIO (*handing her a glass of Asti*): Here—drink some of is.
LUCY (*reluctantly*): I oughtn't to—I never do drink anying. (*She sips it.*) It's very sweet.
SIRIO: Do you not like sweet things?
LUCY: Yes, I do rather—— (*She laughs suddenly.*)
SIRIO: Why do you laugh?
LUCY: Everything seems so fantastic and unreal.
SIRIO: Are you glad you came back?
LUCY: Yes—— (*She hesitates.*) Yes, of course I am.
SIRIO: That is good.
LUCY: Who is that young man over there in green and d?
SIRIO: Antonio Piocchi—he is undertaker's assistant.
LUCY (*shuddering*): How horrible!
SIRIO: He is very attractive, don't you think?
LUCY: Yes, I suppose so.
SIRIO: He has much success—as a lover.
LUCY (*withdrawing instinctively*): Really?
SIRIO: He has nonchalance, you know—and a very, ry good figure—very valuable!
LUCY (*changing the subject*): Do you have these Festas ten?
SIRIO: Does it not please you to talk of Antonio any ore?
LUCY: No—not particularly.
SIRIO: I thought you liked him.
LUCY (*faintly flurried*): Not at all. I only just noticed m. He looks rather funny dressed like that.

SIRIO: Have some more Asti.

LUCY: I haven't finished this yet.

SIRIO: Let me fill up your glass. (*He does so.*)

LUCY: What delicious looking cakes. (*She takes one.*)

SIRIO: How old are you?

LUCY: I beg your pardon?

SIRIO: Should I not have asked you suddenly like that?

LUCY (*laughing*): It doesn't matter. I'm twenty-six.

SIRIO (*with some glee*): You are older than I.

LUCY: I'm sure I am—much.

SIRIO: When were you married?

LUCY (*with faint coldness*): About three years ago.

SIRIO: You do not look married at all.

LUCY (*grandly*): Don't I?

SIRIO: Do you love your husband?

LUCY (*indignantly*): Really, Mr. Marson——

SIRIO: Sirio.

LUCY: But I——

SIRIO (*firmly*): Sirio, please.

LUCY (*breaking down and laughing*): You're behaving awfully badly.

SIRIO: No, I'm not.

LUCY: I don't quite know what to make of you.

SIRIO: I am terribly excited.

LUCY: Why?

SIRIO: Festa night—emotion and drink—all mixed up.

LUCY: I see.

SIRIO: You wish to dance?

LUCY: Not just yet. I would like to sit still a little—I'm rather tired.

SIRIO: You must have some more Asti then. (*He seizes ıe bottle.*)

LUCY (*holding his arm*): No, no more. I don't want it, onestly.

SIRIO: But you must—then you will stop being tired.

He refills her glass and his own.

LUCY: Why do you make me when I've told you I don't ant to?

SIRIO: Because you must not be tired. It will spoil every- ıing for you. You will see things grey instead of gaily ɔloured.

LUCY: Oh, but I'd rather see things grey for a little while. oo much colour makes me dizzy. I'm not used to it.

SIRIO: Poor, poor Lucy!

LUCY: Why do you say that?

SIRIO: Did you not know I was sorry for you?

LUCY: I think you're very rude.

SIRIO (*smiling*): I do not mean to be rude.

LUCY: I resent you saying things like that to me.

SIRIO: Why?

LUCY: Because—because—I just do, that's all.

SIRIO: Do not be angry with me.

LUCY: I'm not.

SIRIO: Yes, you are.

LUCY: I'm *not*.

SIRIO: Have another cake.

LUCY (*grandly taking one*): Thank you.

SIRIO: What shall we talk about?

LUCY: I must be going soon.

SIRIO: No, no. You must stay for hours.

LUCY (*suddenly*): You can't want me to really. (*She turns away.*) I'm so dull.

SIRIO: You are not dull—you are charming.

LUCY (*vehemently*): Yes, I am—I am. I ought never to have come back. I'm out of it, I knew I should be. I'm stupid and serious.

She is almost crying.

SIRIO (*patting her hand*): Cheer up, Lucy.

LUCY: I apologise to you—see, I'm sorry. You want me to enjoy myself, and have a good time, but it's all a mistake. I can't—I've forgotten how—I know you mean to be kind, but—but—I can't play up. I'm a fish out of water. (*She bursts into tears.*)

SIRIO: Little blue fish. (*He takes her hand.*) Wet fish!

LUCY (*withdrawing it*): Don't. Let me go now.

SIRIO: No, not yet.

LUCY: Shall we dance a little then? (*She controls her tears.*)

SIRIO: No—we will talk.

LUCY (*trying to smile*): All right. I expect it is very hot in there.

SIRIO: What a damn fool your husband is.

LUCY (*outraged*): Really, please.

SIRIO (*calmly*): It is true, he is. He has you all to himself and he does not know what to do with you. He goes away and leaves you with that set of flat-chested old women.

LUCY: You really must *not* talk like that.

SIRIO: Why not?

LUCY: Because it's cheap and—and—rather silly.

SIRIO: He's wasting your youth.

LUCY (*beginning to laugh rather hysterically*): How iculous you are.

SIRIO: You are young and you are beautiful.

LUCY (*laughing more and more*): Beautiful—am I? Oh ar!

SIRIO: Did you not know it?

LUCY (*weakly*): Stop—please stop.

SIRIO: Has no one ever told you that?

LUCY: Yes, yes—everybody tells me. They never say ything else.

SIRIO: Do not laugh at me.

LUCY: I can't help it.

SIRIO: I am making love to you?

LUCY: Yes; that's why I'm laughing.

Suddenly a crowd of people rush in from the dancing-room. They are all shouting and making a fearful noise. SIRIO, *who has his back turned, doesn't look at them—he takes* LUCY'S *hand again and gazes into her eyes intensely. Two of the young men in the crowd begin to fight—everyone encourages them with shouts. Gradually it becomes serious, one of them produces a knife.* GIANETTA, *with a shriek, tries to separate them—the fight continues, and several of the other* GIRLS *shriek—the whole effect is thorough turmoil.* SIRIO *still keeps his eyes fixed on* LUCY'S *face. Suddenly she snatches her hand away from him and jumps up in terror.*

, stop them—stop them—they'll kill one another.

SIRIO (*also jumps up and turns*): Stay there—don't ve.

SIRIO *rushes up to the fighters and drags them apart*

—one of them brings his knife down on SIRIO's *hand.* LUCY *gives a scream—the fight stops and everyone crowds round him.* LUCY *leaves the table and pushes her way through to him wildly.*

LUCY (*hysterically*): Let me pass—let me through—get out of the way, damn you all, get out of the way.

The crowd separates and LUCY *drags* SIRIO *down to the table—his left hand is bleeding.*

(*Peremptorily*). Bring water at once. Acqua—acqua—subito——

GIANETTA *rushes to the bar and brings over a bottle of water and a tumbler.* LUCY *snatches a handkerchief out of one of the men's pockets and proceeds to bathe* SIRIO's *hand.*

SIRIO (*looking at her intently and smiling a little*): It is nothing, Lucy.

LUCY (*in business-like tones*): If any dirt gets into it you'll have blood-poisoning. Keep your hand still.

SIRIO: It is still—like a mouse.

The two who were fighting rush up and gesticulate wildly. They are almost weeping with repentance. SIRIO *waves them away with his right hand. A* MAN *comes in from the dancing-room playing an accordion. Everyone cries at him to be quiet.*

No, no, suonate, suonate qualchecosa allegro, cosi noi canteremo tutti assieme. (*He looks at* LUCY.) Is it not, my Lucy?

LUCY: Keep your hand still.

LUCY *finishes bandaging up his hand. He jumps up gaily and runs across and vaults up on to the bar.*

The MAN *with the accordion starts a gay, typically Italian tune.* SIRIO *starts singing, then everyone joins in. They stamp and beat time and dance round in rings.* LUCY *sits still, watching. When the tune is finished everyone cheers loudly, then the* MAN *strikes up a popular American ballad. He plays it without a vestige of rhythm, but with great verve and sentimentality.* SIRIO *starts to sing it in Italian, everyone squats down in a semicircle on the floor. He catches* LUCY'S *eye—he jumps off the bar, and advances towards her through the revellers. He finishes the song in English to her as he reaches the table. Everybody cheers and applauds him, but he shouts at them in Italian to go away. Some of them laugh, and realising that there is a romantic situation in the air they rise and go off in groups to the dancing-room, where someone re-starts the mechanical piano. A few couples go out of the door into the street blowing squeakers and singing.* OLD GIULIA *begins to tidy up the bar in a slightly drunken manner.*

SIRIO: You like my singing?

LUCY: Of course I do—very much.

SIRIO: I was singing for you.

LUCY: Yes—I know.

SIRIO: You are so sweet.

LUCY (*turning her head away*). Don't, please.

SIRIO: Why do you say 'No don't, no don't' all the me? Everything I say you say 'No don't.' What are you ightened of?

LUCY: I'm not frightened.

SIRIO: You are frightened of living.

LUCY (*with a nervous little laugh*): You mean I haven't lived so far, I suppose?

SIRIO: It is true, you haven't.

LUCY: I've lived a very normal, happy life, thank you, and I don't want anything else. No fireworks for me.

SIRIO (*gaily*): Will you come away with me to-night—to Florence to my studio? It has green blinds, and the morning sun comes in and makes all the last night crockery look so terrible—sordid, you understand, but very Bohemian. Oh, very, very Bohemian. I am sure you would love it.

LUCY (*with spirit*): I'm sure I should. When shall we start—and what will your mother say?

SIRIO (*quite angrily*): Do not say things like that, you make me angry. You are so sure of yourself.

LUCY: I have every reason to be.

SIRIO: A fat husband and a comfortable position in middle class society.

LUCY (*serenely*): Yes.

SIRIO: Nothing else—nothing else. No terrible moments—no wonderful moments?

LUCY: None, thank Heaven—I'm very happy and contented.

SIRIO: You are lying. You hate your married life every minute. It is not like what you thought it was going to be. You let down a veil of thick creamy demureness, but I can see—I can see——

LUCY (*smiling*): Can you?

SIRIO: You smile, but there is a little fear behind it—

ear of what I might do next. I might suddenly kiss the fe out of you——

LUCY: You'd never dare!

SIRIO: You challenge me, eh?

LUCY: No, I should never dream of challenging you—ot for anything. You see, you're not quite responsible or——

SIRIO: My words or my actions?

LUCY: Perhaps both. I feel that it is just as well to be areful.

SIRIO: Then you are afraid—just a little.

LUCY: No, no—but I should hate a scene.

SIRIO: Why—they are such fun!

LUCY: For you, I expect—you have that sort of tempera-ient—but not for me.

SIRIO: You are like a deep pool in the rocks—nothing oving—very cool and still—but there is a little channel ou know nothing about, and one day you will be taken y surprise. The great sea will come swirling in froth and oam and coloured bubbles, and you will be stirred to your epths—strange forces you never realised will be dragged o the surface. I am warning you.

LUCY: I wish you wouldn't look at me like that.

SIRIO (*gently*): Dear—I would never hurt you—much.

LUCY: Thank you.

SIRIO: Have some Asti?

LUCY: No, it's too sweet and sickly. Oh, how hot I am! *She passes her hand across her forehead.*)

SIRIO: Lucy—my sweet Lucy. (*He takes her hand.*)

LUCY (*letting it stay in his*): Yes!

SIRIO: I love you.

LUCY: No—oh no, you don't—not love, you—couldn't—it's—I—you don't know what it means.

SIRIO: Do you?

LUCY: Yes, I do.

SIRIO (*smiling*): Your husband!

LUCY (*taking her hand away defiantly*): Yes, my husband—he loves me truly.

SIRIO (*drily*): Oh!

LUCY: You will keep laughing at me—I can see—I'm not such a fool as all that. You Southern people, you're all alike. Fireworks, fits and starts—you jeer at splendid bedrock things because you're incapable of understanding them.

SIRIO: I am not jeering, but I can see a little further than you. I can see your splendid bedrock husband doing his business in Tunis, and in the evenings sitting with his friends—drinking cocktails—watching the women walking by. Oh, he is not unfaithful, I do not suppose that, but his thoughts are not very good. He is glad you are not there with him—he is a much bigger fellow when you are not there—he imagines himself in those women's arms.

LUCY: Stop, stop, how dare you!

SIRIO: It is true.

LUCY: How odious of you to talk like that. How you've sunk in my estimation.

SIRIO: I do not want your estimation.

LUCY: You think that by running down my husband you can—you can——

SIRIO (*softly*): Yes, I can what?

LUCY (*defiantly*): Make me care for you.

SIRIO: Do you not—a little bit?

LUCY: No.

SIRIO: Why did you come back here after the others ad gone?

LUCY: Because I thought it would be amusing. (*She ses.*) And it has been, more than I could possibly have oped. I'm going now—I hope your hand will be better the morning. Good night. (*She holds out her hand. He izes her and kisses her passionately.*) I was expecting that. *She stands quite still.*)

SIRIO (*kissing her again and again*): And that, and that —

LUCY (*evenly*): Yes—that as well—now, good night.

SIRIO: And perhaps this too——

He catches her in his arms and forces her head back, his mouth pressed tightly on hers. She puts out her left hand behind her to save herself from falling and knocks a half-filled glass from the table. She struggles slightly, bringing her right hand down on to the back of his neck, trying to drag his head away, then her other arm suddenly twines round him, pulling him more tightly to her. At last he lets her go, and she sinks on to the chair.

SIRIO (*softly*): You see I was right after all—I knew all ong—from the very first.

She stretches out her hand to him and pulls him down to kiss her again.

LUCY: I love you—I love you.

GIANETTA *flies in from the dancing-room, followed by* PIETRO. *She swings herself up on to the bar.*

GIANETTA: Sono stanca, la mia gola è piena di polvere—Sta fermo, Pietro, non carezzarmi, sai che non posso sopportare le tue manaccie grossolane. Oh! Dio come ho caldo! Avvicinati e fammi un po di vento.

PIETRO: Non posso fare due cose in una. Vuoi da bere, non è vero?

SIRIO (*gently to* LUCY): Are you going to cry?

LUCY: I'm not sure. My hands are shaking. Oh, look at this woman. What does she want?

GIANETTA *comes prancing over with a long biscuit in her hand. She shoves it in* LUCY'S *face.*

SIRIO: Va via, Gianetta.

GIANETTA: Devi prenderne un boccone; non posso mangiarlo tutto, mi farebbe star male.

SIRIO: Pietro, vieni e accompagna Gianetta a casa—è ubbriaca. (*To* LUCY *in English.*) Do not take any notice, she is drunk.

GIANETTA: Ubbriaco sei tu, bestia sporca e maiale che non sei altro. (*She slaps his face.*)

She then crumbles her biscuit all over his hair and runs away. She collides with old GIULIA; *they scream at one another.*

GIULIA: Guarda dove vai.

GIANETTA: Mi sei sempre fra i piedi, vecchia vacca brontolona.

GUILIA: Va pure, lo dirò a tua madre che ti sei comportata tutto il tempo come una vera donnaccia; ti ho bene osservata!

GIANETTA (*shaking her*): Chiudi quella bocca, vecchia agna, e finisci di contar storie. Cosa te ne importa a e la maniera che me la spasso.

GUILIA: Madonna mia sentite—Piccola gatta impertinente—sono abbastanza vecchia da essere tua nonna —tua nonna capisci?

LUCY: Sirio, stop them—oh, please stop them!

PIETRO (*advancing towards the screaming couple*): Questo il tuo bicchiere, Gianetta.

GIANETTA (*striking it out of his hand*): Non voglio quella buttante porcheria, e sono stufa di questo maledetto osto—Andiamo!

GUILIA: Che il diavolo t'accompagni!

GIANETTA: Buona notte, mucchio di tetame putrefatto.

She goes out, dragging PIETRO *after her.* GIULIA *follows them outside, screaming invectives. There is a slight pause, then* LUCY *breaks the silence nervously.*

LUCY: I'm glad they've gone.

SIRIO: You said something just now.

LUCY: Yes.

SIRIO: You said, 'I love you.'

LUCY: Yes.

SIRIO: Is it true?

LUCY: Yes—I don't know, I think so.

SIRIO: I want to kiss you when you say that, but I will ot, because it is such exquisite torture to hold back. I hall have to give in soon. Say it again. 'Sirio, I love you.'

LUCY: Sirio, I love you.

SIRIO: Now softly—very softly whisper it—'Sirio, come me.'

LUCY (*softly*): Sirio, come to me. (*He crushes her in his arms again.*) You're hurting my wrists.

He kisses her madly again and again. She breaks away and stands with her back to the wall, her hands warding him off.

LUCY (*wildly*): You mustn't—no, no—no more. I'm mad, stark mad, I don't know what I'm doing. You mustn't, you mustn't any more. Don't you see, I must go at once.

SIRIO: No, no—Lucy!

LUCY (*trying to pass him*): Let me go.

SIRIO: No!

LUCY (*pitifully*): Let me go—please, please let me go.

SIRIO: You cannot go now—you know that as well as I.

LUCY *sinks down at the table and buries her head in her arms.*

LUCY: Oh, my God!

SIRIO: What is so wrong, my Lucy?

LUCY: I'm dazed—you've smashed everything utterly. I don't know what to do.

SIRIO: Give me both your hands. (*He takes her hands.*) It's silly to be frightened of anything as wonderful as this.

LUCY: You don't understand. Oh, you don't understand!

SIRIO: You love me—I have heard you say it. I can see it in your eyes, nothing could hide it from me. You love me —will you come away with me?

LUCY (*trying to tug her hands away*): No—no—no!

SIRIO: I will plead with you then. You will regret not giving yourself to me—so bitterly you will regret it for years and years until you are too old to mind any more. Your husband will return to you; he will kiss you and love

you—heavy kisses—heavy worthy love, and you will lie n his arms and ache for me, because I am young and my ove for you is the love of youth for youth. Oh, do not you see, do you not see how you have been cheated?

LUCY: You're wrong—you're wrong. There are other things that matter more——

SIRIO: Nothing matters more when you are young—ike us.

LUCY: You're taking too much for granted. I don't ove you really. I couldn't—in so short a time.

SIRIO: What is it then that has made you so different n an hour?

LUCY: I don't know—I don't know.

SIRIO: You have aroused in me something strange—omething I have never quite experienced before. I call it ove—there is no better word—I love you, do you hear ne? I love you—I cannot tell you what it means to me—not now—you would shrink away—all the youth and passion of the ages is in my veins—scorching me up. Look t my eyes—feel my heart. (*He presses her hand against his heart, then closes his eyes and speaks almost in a whisper.*) love you—I love you—I want you.

LUCY (*leans forward and kisses his mouth*): I'll go with you—I don't care for anything ever more, I'll go down o the very dregs with you. I can't help myself. Don't let go my hands, don't let go my hands!

He takes her in his arms, and as he kisses her she slips off the chair on the floor, dragging him with her. The mechanical piano strikes up again in the dancing-room.

CURTAIN

ACT III

The scene is SIRIO'S *study in Florence a week later. On the left there are two high windows and above these a skylight that slopes upwards. At the back on the left there is a door opening on to the landing and stairs. Next to this—a little further over—is a smaller door opening into a minute kitchen. In the middle of the right wall there is a curtained opening into the bedroom. The furniture consists of a table, a couch up left under the windows, a stove up at the back, and several different shaped chairs. There is also an easel, a model throne, and several canvases stacked with their faces to the wall. When the curtain rises it is about ten o'clock in the morning, and the hot sunlight streams in through the windows and skylight, searching out the untidy corners of the room and showing up the general squalor of everything. One end of the table is piled with used crockery. There is a heap of newspapers in a corner, also various kinds of clothes lying about.*

LUCY *comes in from the bedroom. She is fully dressed, but her hair is rather untidy. Her manner has entirely changed, she is no longer placid, her eyes appear larger and quite different, and her whole body is vibrant and trembling. She is obviously in a very bad state of nerves.*

She pauses and looks back into the bedroom. When she speaks her voice is rather queer, giving the impression of not being quite under control.

LUCY: Sirio! (*She stands looking back into bedroom.*)

SIRIO (*grunting*): What is it?

LUCY: Sirio, get up.

SIRIO: Why should I?

LUCY: Get up at once.

SIRIO: Cannot get up. The bed is a warm sea of sleepy grey feathers. I cannot leave it.

LUCY: You must get up. The woman's never come.

SIRIO: Mrs. Robinson is sleeping on my chest. If I wake her, she will bite me.

LUCY (*loudly*): The woman hasn't come.

SIRIO: Why not?

LUCY: I don't know.

SIRIO (*amiably*): Damn her!

LUCY: Yes, but that doesn't help much. The whole place is filthy.

SIRIO (*drowsily*): Life is black—terribly black—the only happiness is sleep. Good night.

LUCY: Sirio, please, please get up.

SIRIO: I shall not.

LUCY: Then I shall make a noise—a bad noise.

She proceeds to pile the used crockery on a tin tray, making as much noise as possible. She carries the crowded tray into the kitchen. SIRIO *appears from the bedroom in his pyjamas. He looks very towsled, and carries the dog in his arms. He glances round at all the disorder.*

SIRIO: Oh God!

LUCY (*re-entering*): What's the matter?

SIRIO: Look at everything.

LUCY: I told you it was awful.

SIRIO: It is worse than that, it is disgusting. I hate it. I hate it—we must go away at once.

LUCY: Where could we go?

SIRIO: Anywhere but this—anywhere—an hotel.

LUCY: I'm not going to an hotel (*She goes back into the kitchen.*)

SIRIO: But, Lucy, it is bad for us to be here—bad for our souls—all this. (*He indicates the studio with magnificent gestures, regardless of the fact that no one is looking.*) It is bad for our self-respect to live in surroundings so horrible.

LUCY (*in kitchen*): What nonsense you're talking, just because the woman hasn't come.

SIRIO: It is bad for the self-respect of Mrs. Robinson.

LUCY (*in kitchen*): It's been like this often before.

SIRIO: Has it? I never noticed.

LUCY (*returning with tablecloth*): I did.

SIRIO: It is no use to lay the table. I do not want breakfast. I could not eat a thing.

LUCY: I want some breakfast. I also want some milk for the coffee. Will you get some clothes on and go and get it?

SIRIO (*angrily*): You are being capable—I hate you when you are capable. You are making the better of a bad job, eh? Rising to an occasion. For God's sake stop and let us both sit down and scream.

LUCY: Don't be temperamental, now, dear; there's too much to do.

SIRIO: Let us go back and sleep.

LUCY: No.

SIRIO: Lucy, do please let us go back and sleep and forget everything.

LUCY: I couldn't. I'm wide awake—desperately wide awake. I'm realising how horrible all this is, and how unhappy I am. (*She goes into the kitchen.*)

SIRIO: It is you who are now temperamental.

LUCY (*in kitchen*): I'm not. (*There is a pause.*)

SIRIO: Lucy—— (LUCY *doesn't answer.*) Lucy?

LUCY (*in kitchen*): What is it?

SIRIO: Lucy—my sweet, sweet Lucy. (*He goes into the kitchen.*)

LUCY: No, Sirio, not now, please—I don't feel in the mood.

SIRIO: But, Lucy——

LUCY: Don't put the dog down by those cups, she'll break them.

SIRIO: I love you. (*There is a crash.*)

LUCY: There now.

SIRIO: I do not care. I love you.

LUCY: If you love me, you'll go and get the milk.

SIRIO, *clutching the dog, rushes out of the kitchen in a fury.*

SIRIO: Oh, you are unromantic—bourgeoise—I hate you—damn the milk! Damn everything! I wish I were dead. (*He rushes into the bedroom.*)

After a moment LUCY *re-enters carrying a tray, upon which there are a loaf of bread, a pot of marmalade and knives and plates, &c. She puts it down wearily*

on the table and goes back into the kitchen. SIRIO *re-enters in a shirt and trousers and with white shoes on his bare feet.*

SIRIO: I am going now.

LUCY (*in kitchen*): All right.

SIRIO: How much milk?

LUCY: I don't know—a quart, I should think.

SIRIO *goes back into the bedroom and comes back with the dog. He goes into the kitchen.*

SIRIO (*in kitchen*): Kiss me.

LUCY: Very well.

SIRIO (*re-entering*): I shall not be more than three minutes. (*He goes out by the street door.*)

LUCY *re-enters with two cups and saucers; she puts them on the table and begins to arrange the breakfast—her manner all the time suggesting that she is trying to control her nerves. When the table is nearly set she suddenly sinks down, and resting her chin on her hands sighs miserably and closes her eyes. Suddenly there comes a loud knock on the street door—she pulls herself together and goes out. In a moment she returns, followed by* STEPHEN *and* MRS. GRIFFIN.

STEPHEN: So you are here.

LUCY: Yes.

STEPHEN: My God—I can't believe it.

LUCY: Won't you sit down?

STEPHEN: No.

LUCY (*bringing a chair forward for* MRS. GRIFFIN): Won't you?

MRS. G. (*grimly*): Thank you. (*She sits.*)

STEPHEN (*after a pause*): This—er—this situation is nothing more nor less than incredible.

LUCY: Yes, I suppose it is.

STEPHEN: What have you to say?

LUCY: I don't know.

MRS. G.: I should think not.

STEPHEN: Mother——

LUCY: I have nothing to say really.

STEPHEN: Where is this—young swine?

LUCY: Don't be silly, Stephen—it was my fault as much as his.

STEPHEN: Silly!

LUCY: Yes—abusing him is silly.

STEPHEN: Where is he?

LUCY: He's gone out.

MRS. G.: Out indeed!

LUCY: Yes—he's gone to get some milk and to take the dog for a run.

MRS. G. (*snorting*): Oh!

LUCY: I know it sounds ridiculous, but he just has.

STEPHEN: I intend to see him.

LUCY: What for?

STEPHEN: Young blackguard!—I'll make him answer for this.

LUCY: You won't!

STEPHEN: We shall see about that.

LUCY: He's not the sort of person you could ever make answer for anything.

STEPHEN: What do you mean by that?

LUCY: I mean that making a scene wouldn't achieve anything at all.

STEPHEN: Your attitude is astounding.

LUCY (*wearily*): I haven't got an attitude——

STEPHEN: I'm waiting for an explanation.

LUCY: What's the good of that?

MRS. G.: I suppose you realise that you are an immoral woman.

LUCY: Words like that don't frighten me—a few weeks ago they might have, but not any more.

MRS. G.: It's true nevertheless.

LUCY: Yes—I suppose it is.

MRS. G.: Horrible—horrible.

STEPHEN: I suppose you think all this calmness is very clever?

LUCY: No. I don't. I feel calm really—I'm not pretending.

STEPHEN: Oh, no—you feel calm, do you?—splendid!

LUCY: Oh, Stephen—don't go on like that.

STEPHEN: How do you expect me to behave—I break off important business negotiations in answer to an urgent telegram from my mother and return to find that you have shamed me publicly—dragged my name in the dust—I very much regret that I am unable to feel as calmly about it as you.

LUCY: I'm sorry about the business negotiations.

STEPHEN: My God! What can I say to you—what can I say to you!

MRS. G.: Shhh—Stephen, Stephen.

LUCY: It just happened—I don't think I could really elp myself.

STEPHEN: You did it to pay me out for not taking you to unis.

LUCY: Do you really think that?

STEPHEN: Yes, I do.

LUCY: You're wrong.

STEPHEN: I remember only too well the scene you made ie day I went away.

LUCY: I wanted to go with you—awfully badly.

STEPHEN: Never mind about that now.

LUCY: I have no excuse to offer at all.

STEPHEN: Do you love this man?

LUCY: I don't know.

STEPHEN: What!

LUCY: Yes—yes—I love him.

MRS. G.: Love indeed—you have thrown aside the real ve of a good man for the sake of a worthless passion.

LUCY: Whatever it was—it swept me away. I told you—couldn't help myself.

STEPHEN: Don't deceive yourself—this has nothing to o with love.

LUCY: In that case I don't know what love is.

STEPHEN: What!

LUCY (*with sudden violence*): And neither do you—you now nothing about it at all. Nothing—nothing—it's tiful!

There comes a loud knock at the downstairs door. LUCY *goes out without a word.*

STEPHEN: What am I to do, mother?

MRS. G.: She's mad.

STEPHEN: What am I to do.

MRS. G.: Come away, my son.

STEPHEN: All Bellagualia will know soon. I can imagine them all gossiping and laughing—it's damnable—damnable!

MRS. G.: She's beyond our reach—beyond the reach of all decent people.

STEPHEN: She shan't shame me like this—I won't have it—I'll spoil this young swine's beauty for him.

MRS. G.: Remember violence may lead to greater scandal—you're an Englishman—be dignified——

LUCY comes in again. She has a letter in her hand. She looks at it listlessly and puts it down on the table.

LUCY (*with forced calm*): Stephen, will you please go away—it's no use going on like this any longer. I don't know why you came really—if it was because you thought I'd been abducted or something and wanted to help me I'm grateful to you, but I've done this entirely voluntarily. There are forces in all of us that we don't know anything about, and something has happened to me that I didn't think possible. I've changed suddenly. I see everything quite, quite differently. I didn't do this out of spite because I thought you were neglecting me—honestly I didn't. You've been a good husband to me really—I know you have—but please, please go away now—you must divorce me as soon as you can—and——

STEPHEN: Divorce—I see you have it all planned very nicely.

LUCY: During these last few days I've been thinking
ings out.

STEPHEN: Pity you didn't do that before.

LUCY: Before there was nothing to think out.

STEPHEN: I trusted you blindly, implicitly.

LUCY: No, Stephen, you never trusted me at all—you
ever thought about it—you took me for granted.

STEPHEN: I naturally didn't expect you to betray me
ith a second-rate foreigner the first moment my back
as turned.

LUCY: Your back had been turned for ages.

STEPHEN: It's no use trying to excuse yourself that
ay.

LUCY: I'm not trying to excuse myself—I'm trying to
e honest.

STEPHEN: Honest. Do you call all this honest?

LUCY: Why did you come here?

STEPHEN: I'll tell you why I came here—I came to
ve you a chance.

LUCY: What sort of chance?

STEPHEN: I didn't expect to find you glorying in your—
our—degradation.

LUCY (*turning away*): I'm not glorying in anything.

MRS. G.: You appear to me to be lost to all sense of
ecency.

LUCY: What sort of chance?

MRS. G.: Have you no finer feelings at all?

LUCY: What sort of chance?

STEPHEN: The chance to atone for what you've done.

LUCY: How?

STEPHEN: I intended to take you back.

LUCY: Take me back?

STEPHEN: Anyhow for a while.

LUCY: Why?

STEPHEN: You're my wife after all.

LUCY: Not now—not any longer.

STEPHEN: I was prepared to be magnanimous.

LUCY: Why?

STEPHEN: Don't keep on saying why, why, why, all the time.

LUCY: I want to know why you were prepared to be magnanimous?

STEPHEN: I've told you—you are my wife and as such you are entitled to my protection.

LUCY (*quivering*): I don't want it—I don't want it—go away!

STEPHEN: Lucy!

MRS. G.: Stephen, leave this to me.

STEPHEN: But, mother——

MRS. G.: Leave it to me. Lucy, do you realise what my son has said to you?

LUCY: Yes.

MRS. G.: And do you realise what you've done?

LUCY: Yes.

MRS. G. (*triumphantly*): Well then——

LUCY (*wildly*): Well then, what?

MRS. G.: Have you no conception of the magnificent, splendid gesture my son is making to you? He is offering to take you back into his life in spite of the fact that you

ave soiled his name irreparably—he is prepared to rein-
ate you as his wife in the eyes of everyone.

LUCY: Why, why, why?

MRS. G.: May God forgive you.

LUCY: Do you want me to go back?

MRS. G.: In your present state of mind, NO!

LUCY: What reason have you for persuading me then?

MRS. G.: I'm not persuading you.

LUCY: Do you want me to come back because you're
rry for me and willing to forgive me and want to help
e, or because you want to hush everything up?

STEPHEN: Lucy!

LUCY: Do you love me, Stephen?

STEPHEN: Do you expect me to love you—after this?

LUCY: No; but do you?

STEPHEN: We will not discuss it.

LUCY: Do you—do you?

STEPHEN (*with great solemnity*): You are asking too
uch of me, Lucy.

LUCY: I'm asking nothing of you but the truth. Do
ou love me? Do you want me as your wife again—now?

STEPHEN: No, Lucy.

LUCY: I thought not.

STEPHEN: But perhaps in time—perhaps in time—if
ou behave yourself—we might manage to regain a certain
er—er——

LUCY: You've cleared my conscience for me.

STEPHEN: This has gone on long enough—stop arguing.

MRS. G.: You're a wicked, ungrateful woman.

LUCY: I expect nothing from you—your manner to me

to-day has proved to me completely that you don't love me a bit and probably never did.

STEPHEN: Lucy!

LUCY: You're not hurt in any way—your heart isn't touched—you are only angry. You say that as your wife I am entitled to your protection, but I've been unfaithful to you, so that cancels that. You say you will be magnanimous and give me a chance to atone, but that's utterly and completely untrue. You wish me to come back so that the scandal can be smoothed over——

STEPHEN: It's easy to see the effect of this sort of life on your character.

MRS. G.: You're hopeless, hopeless! Come away, Stephen.

LUCY: No, no—don't go—I must make you see—I want to make you understand that I'm sorry, really sorry for having upset you and made things difficult, but it's not as serious and important as you think it is—really and truly it isn't, because you don't love me, Stephen; you never have really, and I don't love you. We were silly to marry, and it's been a failure, it's no life for either of us just existing on and on without warmth until we're old—we're miles apart and always have been. Don't look like that, I'm not talking nonsense—it's from my heart all this—I want you to see—I want you to see——

STEPHEN: It's no good arguing——

LUCY: Let me speak—you must, this is probably the last time we shall ever see each other, and you must listen to me. If you had loved me, really loved me, this could never have happened—that's not an excuse, it's the truth.

MRS. G.: It is not the truth—the truth is that you have

been thoroughly weak and unprincipled and given way to base sensuality; you're that sort of a woman—I've always known it.

LUCY: And yet you wish me to go back to your son.

MRS. G.: I do not.

LUCY: I'm not weak and unprincipled. If I were I should have left Stephen ages ago. We have no tie of any sort but the memory of a short service in church. Since then we haven't even had enough interest in one another to be friends. We've been bored, bored, bored. If we had children it would be different, but we haven't—we're answerable to no one but ourselves.

MRS. G.: What about your duty to your husband and your duty to society?

LUCY: I realise I've done wrong in breaking a social law, and for that I shall suffer all right. You needn't think I don't know, but what I want to make you see is that I haven't wronged Stephen nearly as deeply as you think I have.

MRS. G.: You've lost all moral sense.

STEPHEN (*striding about*): I'm sorry for you—that's all—sorry for you.

LUCY: You think I'm bad and rotten because I've given way to some force in me that I didn't know existed—but I'm not bad, because I'm hurting no one—no one but myself.

She sinks down at the table and buries her head in her arms.

MRS. G.: Hysteria—that's all—hysteria.

STEPHEN: Lucy——

LUCY: I'm not crying—I'm only terribly—terribly tired.

STEPHEN: I should like to know what you propose to do when this—this—affair is over?

LUCY: Over?

STEPHEN: Things like this don't last.

LUCY: I've got an allowance—sufficient to keep me from starving—I shall try and get work somewhere.

STEPHEN: You'll go down—you'll be wretched—and it will serve you right. I can see quite well what will become of you—there's no decency in the sort of life you're going to live. Work! I know what you'll be——

MRS. G.: Stephen—come away.

STEPHEN: Your utter shamelessness is appalling.

LUCY: I'm sorry, Stephen.

STEPHEN: You're not sorry—that's what beats me—you're not sorry at all.

LUCY: Oh yes, I am—bitterly, bitterly sorry.

STEPHEN: Then why didn't you say so before?

LUCY: Because it's no affair of yours!

MRS. G.: Well, really——

LUCY (*suddenly losing control*): Go away from me—for the love of God, go away from me! (STEPHEN *and* MRS. GRIFFIN *walk out in silence.*)

LUCY, *with a tremendous effort, continues to lay the breakfast table. She is trembling violently, so she sits down for a moment on the edge of a chair and forces herself to be calm.* SIRIO *puts his head round the door.*

SIRIO: Lucy!

LUCY: You've been a long time.

SIRIO: I have been waiting on the landing—your fat

husband passed me quite close like that—I could have pinched his ear.

LUCY: Sirio! (*She bursts into tears.*)

SIRIO (*putting down the milk and coming to her*): Oh, Lucy—my poor, poor Lucy—what have they said to you?

LUCY: You must have heard most of it.

SIRIO: It was very dramatic. You were wonderful, my Lucy—so brave and defiant—like Joan of Arc.

LUCY (*turning away*): Don't be absurd.

SIRIO: He is a very silly man, your husband. (*Sits.*)

LUCY: Stop, Sirio——

SIRIO: And your husband's mother—she is very, very large.

LUCY: How can you joke about it?

SIRIO: I am not joking. Why are all English women so big? Will you be big, too, like that one day?

LUCY (*stamping her foot*): Stop talking like that!

SIRIO: You will not go back to them then, eh?

LUCY (*amazed*): What?

SIRIO (*advancing to her again*): It is for me you are so brave? You are splendid, my Lucy. I am so, so happy. (*He kisses her*). Here is the milk.

He hands it to her and goes into the bedroom.

LUCY: Sirio!

SIRIO (*off*): Mrs. Robinson is weary after her walk.

LUCY *shakes her head hopelessly—he returns.*

LUCY: There's a letter for you on the table.

She goes into the kitchen.

SIRIO: Thank you.

He opens the letter and reads it. He ruffles his hair,

obviously irritated, then puts the letter in his pocket. Re-enter LUCY *with coffee-pot and milk jug.*

LUCY: We can't have hot milk because there isn't a respectable saucepan to boil it in.

SIRIO: I do not like hot milk.

LUCY: That's all right then.

SIRIO: It makes dead white bodies float about on the coffee.

LUCY: Don't be disgusting.

SIRIO: It is true.

LUCY: Was the letter important?

SIRIO: No—no!

LUCY: Will you cut some bread—and sit down?

SIRIO: Life is terrible. (*He cuts bread while* LUCY *pours out the coffee.*)

LUCY (*after a pause*): Sirio!

SIRIO: There is bread for you.

LUCY: Thank you, Sirio.

SIRIO (*passing butter*): And butter. It is not butter, it is yellow soup. Ugh! (*He shudders.*)

LUCY: Sirio—we must talk things over seriously. Morning like this is the best time, I think—cold and unemotional.

SIRIO: I do not want to talk.

LUCY: I'm sorry, but I must—facts have got to be faced.

SIRIO: Why?

LUCY: Did you expect me to go back to Stephen?

SIRIO: What?

LUCY: Did you want me to?

SIRIO: Lucy, you are so silly.

LUCY: Answer me—did you?

SIRIO: Of course I did not—I love you.

LUCY: We can't go on like this much longer, you know.

SIRIO (*with his mouth full*): Why not?

LUCY (*patiently*): Do you think we can?

SIRIO: Yes—yes—happy ever after, eh?

LUCY: Oh, don't be irritating. You know perfectly well
e can't.

SIRIO (*obligingly*): All right—we can't. (*Drinks some
offee.*)

LUCY (*biting her lip*): Please, dear—don't be unkind—
elp me.

SIRIO: I do not want to talk now. I do not want to face
nything. It is too early.

LUCY (*abruptly*): Very well. (*She lapses into silence and
oes on with her breakfast.*)

SIRIO (*suddenly, with rather forced enthusiasm*): I have
wonderful idea.

LUCY: Have you?

SIRIO: Superb.

LUCY: Give me the marmalade, will you?

SIRIO: It is there—beneath your nose.

LUCY: Thank you.

SIRIO: You do not wish to know my idea?

LUCY (*listlessly*): Yes—what is it?

SIRIO: We will go to Venice. It will be beautiful now.
Ve will lie in gondolas and look up at the stars. I am sick
f this place—we will go to-day.

LUCY: Are you sure there wasn't anything important in
hat letter?

SIRIO: Yes, I told you so.

LUCY: What's the matter then?

SIRIO: Nothing is the matter.

LUCY: I *know* something's the matter—I can *see* there is.

SIRIO (*irritably*): I tell you there is not.

LUCY: Who was the letter from?

SIRIO: My mother.

LUCY: Won't you tell me?

SIRIO: It is only that she is unhappy, my stepfather has got very drunk and run away to Genoa with a girl from a café—and——

LUCY: Your mother wants you to go to her?

SIRIO: Yes, but you need not worry. I will not go.

LUCY: Why not?

SIRIO: Why not! What do you mean, why not? How can I?

LUCY: I think you must go, Sirio.

SIRIO: You are mad. I cannot, you know I cannot.

LUCY: I don't know anything of the sort.

SIRIO: Where would you go?

LUCY: What does that matter?

SIRIO: You say you will not go back to your husband.

LUCY: Ah!

SIRIO: What do you mean—ah?

LUCY: I believe you would have been relieved if I had gone back—now—to-day.

SIRIO: You wish to quarrel with me, eh? Because you have hysteria.

LUCY: No, no. I don't, but—but——

SIRIO: But what, my Lucy?

LUCY: Something had to happen—don't you see—we ouldn't go on indefinitely.

SIRIO: A friend of mine, Pietro Farino, has had a mistress or five years.

LUCY: Mistress.

SIRIO: Yes—the same one—all the time.

LUCY: Sirio—how can you——

SIRIO: Oh, Lucy—do not be so stupid.

LUCY: I'm not stupid—I'm not stupid—I can see some-hing that you won't see.

SIRIO: What is that then?

LUCY: It's over—all that—over—you must go back to our mother.

SIRIO: I am not going, and there is the end of it.

LUCY: I am.

SIRIO: What do you mean?

LUCY: I am going away.

SIRIO: Where to?

LUCY: I don't know—Paris, I should think.

SIRIO: Why?

LUCY: I want to go right away alone—I want room to hink things out.

SIRIO: You are very cold and calm suddenly—like a eautiful statue. (*He laughs.*)

LUCY: Don't laugh, please.

SIRIO: Where is your passion? Has it all died away?

LUCY: I wish you wouldn't talk like that.

SIRIO: How will you live when you are alone—thinking hings out?

LUCY: I shall be all right.

SIRIO (*after a moment's pause*): Oh, I see. (*He crumbles his bread.*) You are tired of me! (*He laughs slightly.*)

LUCY: Don't be silly.

SIRIO: It is true. That is what made you so changed—so difficult.

LUCY: I'm *not* difficult.

SIRIO: Yes—yes you are. You are tired of me—this is the moment for which you have been waiting, eh?

LUCY: I've got to be alone and face things.

SIRIO: What is this—'face things'; you are always wishing to 'face things.' I do not understand.

LUCY: It's necessary.

SIRIO (*laughing*): It will be lovely, eh?

LUCY: I'm serious.

SIRIO: You are a fool!

LUCY: I'm *not* a fool. It's finished—finished.

SIRIO: What is finished?

LUCY (*almost hysterically*): You know it is.

SIRIO: You mean this love of ours, eh?

LUCY: Not love—not love—it was never love—not for a minute.

SIRIO: What do you expect of love? A happy fireside, with pink flowers in pots outside the window and a rocking chair, and lots of babies, and going to church on Sunday, and a servant with a white cap very high on her head like a bird, and afternoon tea. I have been to England, you know—that is what English ladies want of love.

LUCY: You say I'm tired of you—you're just as tired of me.

SIRIO (*laughing angrily*): Oh, ho! Now you put the blame
n me—it is my fault!
LUCY: You despise me because I'm different from you—
ecause I don't lose control every five minutes, and sob
nd cry and laugh and make scenes.
SIRIO: You are trying to make a scene now.
LUCY: I'm trying to make you see the uselessness of
retending that we're happy together.
SIRIO: We might be happy if you were not so ladylike,
y Lucy.
LUCY: You knew I was 'ladylike' when you first made
ve to me.
SIRIO: Do not argue. Let us stop this, 'you did this, I
d that—you did this, I did that'—it will drive me mad.
LUCY (*hopelessly*): It's a hideous, horrible mistake—the
nole thing. I'm not blaming you any more than myself,
t so much really. You wanted me, I suppose, and it
nused you to see how quickly you could get me. You're
thing but a light-hearted, thoughtless little animal.
SIRIO (*angrily*): Lucy!
LUCY: You lead a life without morals or behaviour be-
use those things don't mean anything to you.
SIRIO (*laughing*): Oh, Lucy—my Lucy! (*He rests his
ad on the table and roars with laughter.*)
LUCY: (*vehemently*): But they mean something to me.
ve read about passion and thought about passion, but
fore I met you I'd never known it. I had idealised it
my mind as something thrilling and romantic. I had
agined that love—free love was a daring, courageous

reality in life, but it isn't, it isn't—at least not for women like me—it's hateful and sordid and cheap!

SIRIO: Our beautiful romance is over—ah me, that is terrible. (*He rises laughing and kicks the pile of newspapers about the room.*)

LUCY (*wildly*): Don't laugh at me.

SIRIO: I cannot listen to your heroics—you are not Lucy any more. You are a *prima donna* singing out of tune.

LUCY: My life is smashed up utterly, and you laugh at me—you laugh at me—— (*She buries her face in her hands.*)

SIRIO: I laugh because you are so funny. You were not happy before—you are not happy now. You are never happy. Dio, what can I do?

LUCY: I don't care—I don't care what you do. (*She bursts into tears.*)

SIRIO (*after a pause*): Lucy!

LUCY: Don't speak to me.

SIRIO: Lucy—please!

LUCY: Go away—leave me alone!

SIRIO: I am sorry, my Lucy!

LUCY: What's the use of being sorry. It's hopeless—hopeless.

SIRIO: You worry over the things that do not matter.

LUCY: You won't see.

SIRIO: What should I see?

LUCY: Nothing. Leave me alone.

SIRIO (*indicating the room*): It is all this—it has got upon your nerves. I know it. We shall be happy in Venice.

LUCY: You're trying to fight against the inevitable.

SIRIO: Nothing is inevitable.

LUCY (*with hysterical vehemence, banging her spoon on r plate*): Yes, yes, now—that letter from your mother a sign—a sign that it's all over—you're young and pendent really.

SIRIO (*hotly*): I am *not* dependent.

LUCY (*beginning to laugh*): Yes, you are, that's what's funny.

SIRIO (*angrily*): You laugh now, eh?

LUCY (*laughing wildly*): All this week has been funny— the thrill and passion of it—fantastic and absurd be- use there was nothing behind it all but youth—glori- s, irresponsible, white-hot youth—dependent on its ther——

SIRIO: It is not true—it is my mother who is dependent me.

LUCY: Who gives you the money to live here?

SIRIO: I earn it with my painting.

LUCY: That's a lie. You told me yesterday——

SIRIO: Stop, stop! Do not talk any more.

LUCY: I've given up everything for this glorious youth I can never get back what I've lost, it's too late. I'm ne—no one to turn to at all. Don't stand there staring me. It's silly! (*She goes on laughing, trying to control rself.*)

SIRIO (*looking at her intently*): I do not think I am tired t. I want you very much still. (*He catches hold of her.*)

LUCY: Go away—go away.

SIRIO (*kissing her violently*): Lucy—Lucy!

LUCY (*struggling*): No, no—not now.

SIRIO (*holding her in his arms*): Yes—now—you say this

is the end, eh? We will see then. If it is the end there must be a climax, must there not? Something big—something dramatic, with tears and kisses and passionate farewell. Juliet—Francesca—Beatrice—— (*He kisses her again.*)

LUCY: Let me go. No, Sirio—stop!

SIRIO (*bending her back*): Tired of me—very, very tired of me—struggling against my kisses——

LUCY (*almost shrieking*): Let me go—let me go. Don't touch me any more, I can't bear it. (*She writhes in his arms.*)

SIRIO (*becoming more and more impassioned*): I will get you back to me—you cannot have gone very far away yet.

LUCY: I hate you! I hate you!

SIRIO, *still holding her arms, kisses her neck, then her eyes, and her hair, and then her lips. She succumbs to him and he lets go her arms: he is quivering and murmuring disjointed love endearments. Suddenly with a superhuman effort she pushes him aside. She is shaking in every limb, the table separates them, and he stands looking at her with his head thrust slightly forward.*)

SIRIO (*tensely*): Come here.

LUCY: No.

SIRIO: Come here. Do you think I shall let you go? Come here.

LUCY: Don't you touch me again.

SIRIO (*moving round the table towards her*): Come here—I want you.

LUCY (*moving round away from him*): Stop, stop—go away. Sirio——

SIRIO: Stand still—you are making me angry. Stand still.

They both move round more quickly.

LUCY: Sirio, please—for God's sake—I'm tired. My ead's aching. Don't look like that—you're mad.

SIRIO: Stand still.

LUCY: See—I'll stand still then. I'll let you kiss me.

She stands still—immovable. He catches her in his arms. She keeps her body rigid and her fists clenched while he kisses her.

SIRIO (*through clenched teeth*): Kiss me.

LUCY: No.

SIRIO: Kiss me.

LUCY: I won't.

SIRIO: Be cold then—ice cold—blast you!

He strikes her across the face. She gives a little cry and falls on to the couch.

LUCY: You beast!

SIRIO: Do you think I care what you say—all over, is The end, eh? We will have an end worth remembering.

He goes towards her: she rises and runs across towards the bedroom—he intercepts her, and once more the table separates them.

LUCY (*losing all control*): You beast, you beast, you ıte! I'll kill you—you're loathsome—loathsome—don't ne near me!

SIRIO (*across the table*): Dam' fool, Lucy. Little cold fish no passion—no love—nothing—white paper, that is all, thing on each side—no love words, no heart. You make sick, but I will show you passion, you understand—you ı tell your friends afterwards and your stupid fat husnd who goes off to Tunis with the Arab women——

LUCY: Cad—filthy, filthy cad!

She picks up the china coffee-pot and throws it full at him. He dodges and it smashes against the wall. She is screaming—odd, little, inarticulate sounds. He rushes round and catches her again. She beats him on the head and shoulders. He catches her hand; in course of the struggle they knock the table over and fall on to the floor themselves, rolling over and over, fighting madly. Finally SIRIO *leaps up and rushes into the bedroom, leaving her lying on the floor. She drags herself up on to a chair and mechanically tidies her hair with her hand —then she sits there quite still, staring at nothing.*

SIRIO *re-enters with a hat on—his overcoat is over one arm, and he carries the dog under the other. He is crying miserably.*

SIRIO (*sobbing*): I go away—you understand. I go to my mother—here is money. (*He planks down some notes on the table.*) I am no lover for you—I love too much or too little—and you—you do not love at all—but I am sorry, and if we meet one day we will be friends perhaps. My Lucy—my sweet, sweet Lucy—— Good-bye, my Lucy——

He goes out of the street door.

LUCY (*suddenly lifts her arms above her head. With exultance*): I'm free—free for the first time in my life. (*Her face changes.*) God help me! (*She leans on the table and buries her head in her arms.*)

CURTAIN

HOME CHAT

TO

MARY BORDEN

CHARACTERS

JANET EBONY
PAUL EBONY
PETER CHELSWORTH
MAVIS WITTERSHAM
MRS. EBONY
MRS. CHILHAM
ALEC STONE
LAVINIA HARDY
PALLETT
TURNER

SCENES

T I. JANET EBONY'S *house in Chelsea.*
T II. PETER CHELSWORTH'S *flat in St. James s. The following day.*
T III. *Same as Act I. Two weeks later.*

'HOME CHAT' was first performed in England at the Duke of York's Theatre on October 25, 1927, with the following cast:

PALLETT	PAULINE NEWTON
MAVIS WITTERSHAM	MARDA VANNE
PAUL EBONY	GEORGE RELPH
MRS. CHILHAM	NINA BOUCICAULT
MRS. EBONY	HENRIETTA WATSON
LAVINIA HARDY	HELEN SPENCER.
JANET EBONY	MADGE TITHERADGE
PETER CHELSWORTH	ARTHUR MARGETSON
TURNER	TOM WOODS
ALEC STONE	GEORGE CURZON

The play produced by BASIL DEAN.

ACT I

he scene is JANET EBONY'S *drawing-room in Chelsea. The time is about five o'clock on a Spring afternoon. It is a pleasant room furnished with taste and discretion; on the left there is a door leading into the dining-room and further up on the left a double door leading into the hall and other rooms, also the front door. On the right is a door above the fireplace leading into Paul's study and thence to his bedroom. At the back in the centre is a large window reaching almost to the ground and commanding a view of trees and the river.*

When the curtain rises, PALLETT, *the parlour-maid, ushers in* MAVIS WITTERSHAM. MAVIS *is adequately well dressed without being embarrassingly chic; she is still lingering rather wistfully in the thirties and has an air of almost imperceptible defiance which in a few years will probably blossom into open truculence. She is not yet generally alluded to as 'poor* Mavis,' *but that, too, will come with the years.*

PALLETT: Mr. Ebony is not back, yet, ma'am.

MAVIS: I really called to see Mrs. Ebony. What time do u expect her?

PALLETT: I can't say exactly, ma'am, sometime to-day, yhow.

MAVIS: Thank you—I'll wait a little.

PALLETT: Would you like some tea?

MAVIS: No, thank you, I've had some.

PALLETT: Very good, ma'am. (*She goes out.*)

MAVIS, *left alone, wanders about the room and pauses before a photograph of* JANET. *After she has scrutinised it carefully for a moment, she powders her nose rather crossly and goes over to the window.* PAUL *enters, he is nice-looking and dressed unobtrusively in grey. He is faintly conscious of his reputation as a successful novelist, and discards his intellect with charming magnanimity when talking to ordinary people; with* MAVIS, *however, he has a splendid mental 'rapport' and is therefore perfectly at ease.*

PAUL: Hallo, old thing.

MAVIS (*turning*): Paulo—to-day *is* a beautiful day, isn't it? Look at the blossom.

PAUL: Wonderful.

MAVIS: Life's funny, you know.

PAUL: In what way?

MAVIS: Oh, lots of ways. What time is Janet arriving?

PAUL: I don't know—she sent me one of her usual vague telegrams. She'll probably get in about 7.15, the train that leaves Paris at noon.

MAVIS: You're such a nice person, Paulo—so satisfactory.

PAUL (*laughing*): Why?

MAVIS: You're so tremendously glad, aren't you?

PAUL: About Janet coming back?

MAVIS (*smiling*): Yes.

PAUL: Of course.

MAVIS: Decency is terribly important.

PAUL: Mighty few people seem to know about it.

MAVIS: Never mind—we do. (*They both laugh understandingly.*) How's 'The Gods Decide' going?

PAUL: Pretty well. I worked late last night.

MAVIS: Your eyes look tired.

PAUL: Do they?

MAVIS: I take back what I said about Nora in the first hapter—I've been thinking it over—you're absolutely ight, but then you generally are, aren't you?

PAUL: Not a bit of it.

MAVIS: Are you going to read it to Janet?

PAUL (*carelessly*): If she wants me to.

MAVIS: Will she?

PAUL: Shut up, Mavis—you subtle devil.

MAVIS: You don't have to pretend—with me.

PAUL: Don't I know it?

MAVIS: Well, why do you?

PAUL: I don't.

MAVIS: Sometimes—a little.

PAUL: Janet's all right.

MAVIS: Of course she is—she's a darling and I adore er—that's why I came to-day to welcome her back.

PAUL: She'll love to see you.

MAVIS: I wonder.

PAUL: Why do you say that?

MAVIS: Oh, I don't know—Janet likes me as 'me,' I hink, but——

PAUL: But what?

MAVIS: I feel sometimes that she is a tiny bit jealous of my understanding of you.

PAUL: Do you understand me so well?

MAVIS: Yes, Paulo.

PAUL: Why?

MAVIS: We see through things together.

PAUL: That's true.

MAVIS: It's luck really more than anything—luck that we happened to meet, I mean—we might have gone all through our lives without coming across one another at all. I should have hated that.

PAUL: So should I—but we shouldn't have known.

MAVIS: We should both have realised that something was missing.

PAUL: It's strange, isn't it, how one's ideas change—at one time of my life I could never have imagined friendship with a woman—without anything else.

MAVIS: Couldn't you, Paulo?

PAUL: I didn't believe it was possible.

MAVIS: It isn't with most people.

PAUL: Is it you who are so different, or me?

MAVIS: Both of us. We've learned to distinguish gold from dross.

PAUL: Passionate love isn't dross, though, always.

MAVIS: No, but it usually tarnishes after a while.

PAUL: I *do* like your brain, Mavis. (*He laughs.*) Quick as a knife——

MAVIS: Well, I'm not entirely contemptuous of yours.

They both laugh understandingly. PALLETT *enters.*

PALLETT (*announcing*): Mrs. Chilham.

MRS. CHILHAM *enters. She is* JANET'S *mother, and is small and attractive, and has obviously enjoyed good looks all her life without being in the least governed by them. She is usually gay and sweet, but to-day appears to be slightly harassed.* PAUL *is always delightfully chivalrous with her which secretly irritates her to madness.*

PAUL (*advancing*): My dear—— (*He kisses her.*)

MRS. C.: Where's Janet?

PAUL: I had a wire from her this morning—I shouldn't nagine she'd arrive before seven.

MAVIS: How do you do, Mrs. Chilham?

MRS. C. (*shaking hands*): Please forgive me, I never aw you—you must have been in the shadow or some-ning.

PAUL: Would you like some tea?

MRS. C.: No, thank you, Paul, I hate tea.

PAUL: Are you upset about anything?

MRS. C. (*looking at him carefully*): Upset?—No—not a it—are you?

PAUL: On the contrary, I'm very happy to-day.

MRS. C.: Because Janet is coming back?

PAUL: Naturally.

MAVIS (*archly*): He's been behaving like a boy out of chool, Mrs. Chilham.

MRS. C.: How nice.

PAUL: Why did you ask?

MRS C.: Ask what?

PAUL: Whether I was upset about anything?

MRS. C.: Oh, just because *you* asked *me*.

MAVIS: But you looked rather worried, Mrs. Chilham.

MRS. C.: It's that hat, I think—I don't care for it very much.

PAUL: I think all your hats are charming.

MRS. C.: I have lots of awful ones in the country. I wear them in the garden.

There is a slight pause.

MAVIS: Are you in London for long?

MRS. C.: Just a few days.

MAVIS: Where are you staying?

MRS. C.: At my club—it's so near the Academy.

PAUL: I hate the Academy.

MRS. C.: So do I.

PAUL: Are you sure you're not worried about anything?

MRS. C.: Quite—why should I be?

PAUL: You seem so strange.

MRS. C.: Are you certain Janet won't be here until seven?

PAUL: No, not certain. She wired me—but you know what Janet's wires are like.

MRS. C.: Are they very different from anybody else's wires?

PAUL: Well, they're not very helpful—she just said 'arriving to-day.' No time or train or anything—so I can't very well meet her, can I?

MRS. C.: No, I suppose not. Was it a happy wire?

PAUL (*puzzled*): Happy?

MRS. C.: It didn't sound as if she were ill or miserable or frightened?

PAUL: Something *is* wrong—have you heard from her?

MRS. C.: Yes—she telephoned me early this morning rom Paris—she just started to tell me about the accident nd then we were cut off.

PAUL: Accident!

MAVIS: What sort of accident?

MRS. C.: Railway accident—didn't you read about it in he paper?

PAUL: Good God, yes, but she wasn't in that—she was n the Blue Train.

MRS. C.: No—she couldn't get reservations so she went n the ordinary Rapide and her carriage was telescoped hatever that means.

PAUL: This is appalling—I'd no idea—I——

MAVIS: Well, she's obviously unhurt, otherwise she ouldn't be able to telephone and send telegrams.

MRS. C.: And you didn't know anything about it at all?

PAUL: Not a thing.

MRS. C.: Oh, dear.

PAUL: She is all right, isn't she?—You're not keeping nything back?

MRS. C.: She sounded a little shaky, but that may have een the telephone—they have to go under the sea, don't ney?

PAUL: What?

MRS. C.: The telephone wires.

PAUL: Yes.

MRS. C.: Then that was it.

PAUL: I can't understand her not mentioning it in her legram.

MRS. C.: Perhaps she wanted to surprise you.

MAVIS: That would be typical of Janet.

MRS. C. (*wistfully*): She *does* love surprising people.

PAUL: All the same, I think she *ought* to have let me know.

MRS. C. (*off her guard for a moment*): Oh, so do I, it would have looked much better.

PAUL: How do you mean?

MAVIS: I agree with Mrs. Chilham.

PAUL (*astonished*): Mavis!

MAVIS: It would have looked *much* better.

PAUL: What on earth are you talking about?

MAVIS: I knew about the accident, but I didn't say anything about it because I didn't want to worry you —I thought it would be better for her to tell you herself.

PAUL (*becoming agitated*): There's something behind all this—something you're both hiding from me. (*To* MRS. CHILHAM *sternly*.) Tell me, please.

MRS. C.: Wait until Janet comes.

PAUL: Mavis?

MAVIS: It's no business of mine.

MRS. C.: You must be very gentle and considerate to Janet when she does arrive.

PAUL: I insist on you telling me everything.

MRS. C.: You left her in Cannes a week ago, didn't you?

PAUL: Yes—I had to get back to work.

MRS. C.: And your mind was perfectly easy about her?

PAUL: Certainly.

MRS. C.: Well then, there's nothing to worry about, is there?

PAUL (*to* MAVIS *with charm and restraint*): Mavis, old

ning—cards on the table, please. Don't keep me on the ack any longer—if there's anything to tell, tell me.

MAVIS: The carriage in which Janet was travelling was ompletely wrecked with the exception of her compart-ent—she and Peter Chelsworth were the only ones who scaped uninjured.

PAUL: Peter?—Was Peter with her?

MAVIS: Yes, he was in her compartment when the smash ccurred.

PAUL: What time *did* it occur?

MAVIS: Three-thirty in the morning. They were both terviewed in night attire.

PAUL: You mean they were sharing a wagon-lit?

MAVIS: Obviously.

PAUL: Good God!

MAVIS: Their escape was so miraculous that they were ked to give interviews to all the French papers, but they eclined apparently.

MRS. C.: Thank heaven for that.

PAUL: I don't understand.

MAVIS (*gently*): Poor old Paulo.

PAUL: And you knew this all day?

MAVIS: Yes.

PAUL: Well, why did you keep it from me?

MAVIS: As I said before—it's no business of mine—I ouldn't have told you now if you hadn't forced me to.

MRS. C.: I must say I consider Mrs. Wittersham's atti-de very right and proper—it *is* no business of hers.

PAUL *leaves them both and goes to the window. He stands with his back turned to them for a moment, his*

hands clenched at his side. He turns, and it should be palpable to a child of two that he is captain of his soul.

PAUL: I really am very annoyed with Janet.

MAVIS (*softly*): Bravo, Paulo.

MRS. C.: Why do you call him Paulo?

MAVIS: I always have—it's just a nickname.

MRS. C.: I see.

PAUL: What a bit of luck that Peter happened to be on the train—to look after her.

MAVIS: Wasn't it fortunate?

PAUL: Splendid—Good old Peter, but I intend to give her a good talking to when she gets back.

MAVIS: I can't understand how you missed seeing it in the paper.

PAUL: I only looked at the headlines this morning—I'm glad, really—I'd much rather wait for Janet's story.

MAVIS: I'm sure it will be very colourful.

MRS. C.: What do you mean, Mrs. Wittersham?

MAVIS: Well, it ought to be, oughtn't it?—I'm sure I should make the most of a railway accident if one happened to me.

PAUL: It must have been a narrow shave.

MAVIS: Was Peter in Cannes when you were there?

PAUL: Yes—he's been in Egypt, you know, for two years. He only got back last month—he's one of Janet's oldest friends, isn't he, dear?

MRS. C.: Yes.

PAUL: They more or less grew up together, didn't they?

MRS. C.: Yes—they met during the war.

PAUL (*suddenly*): Oh, my God. (*He turns away, broken for a moment.*)

MAVIS: I understand, Paulo.

PAUL: It's just rather a shock, you know.

MRS. C.: I've always felt that those French trains are dreadfully unsafe.

PAUL: I wish I'd never left her—if it hadn't been for this damned novel, I'd have stayed.

MAVIS: Did Peter and Janet see much of one another in Cannes when you were there?

PAUL: Peter only arrived two days before I left. He dined with us and lunched, that's all.

MAVIS: I can't understand Janet behaving like that.

MRS. C.: Like what?

MAVIS: Well, my dear Mrs. Chilham—even you as Janet's mother must see that for the wife of an eminent novelist to compromise herself so very publicly, is a little inconsiderate.

MRS. C.: Try as I will, Mrs. Wittersham, I cannot see that what Janet does is any affair of yours.

PAUL (*soothingly*): My dear—don't please—Mavis——

MAVIS: I happen to be very fond of Paulo.

MRS. C.: That would be obvious to the meanest intelligence.

MAVIS: And I don't like to see him let down.

MRS. C.: Then we must all be very, very careful, mustn't we?

Enter PALLETT.

PALLETT (*announcing*): Mrs. Ebony.

MRS. EBONY *enters. She is a gaunt woman dressed in black—her expression is slightly forbidding.* PALLETT *goes out.*

MRS. E.: Paul. (*She kisses him swiftly.*) How are you, Mavis? (*To* MRS. CHILHAM.) Violet—I'm very glad you're here. What is to be done?

PAUL (*appealingly*): Mother!

MRS. E.: I repeat—what is to be done?

MRS. C.: What is to be done about what, Agnes?

MRS. E.: About Janet's abominable behaviour.

PAUL: Would you like some tea, mother?

MRS. E.: No, thank you—it would choke me.

MRS. C.: I see no reason for you to be in such a terrible state—Janet is quite safe—I talked to her on the telephone this morning.

MRS. E.: Safe indeed!

MRS. C.: I thought her voice sounded a little shaky, poor darling.

MRS. E.: Who is this Peter Chelsworth?

MAVIS: He's a very old friend of Janet's.

MRS. E.: Have I ever met him?

PAUL: Yes, surely you remember him, mother? He dined here when you were staying with us about three years ago.

MRS. E.: I do not remember him.

MRS. C. (*without conviction*): He's a charming young man.

MRS. E.: Do you approve of Janet sharing sleeping cars with all the charming young men of her acquaintance?

MRS. C.: Certainly not—and she doesn't.

MRS. E.: I am at a loss to understand *your* attitude, Paul.

PAUL: I'm sorry, mother.

MAVIS: Paulo is waiting with an open mind.

MRS. E. (*to* MRS. CHILHAM): I suppose it's only natural that you should stand up for Janet.

MRS. C.: I'm not standing up for her. I see no reason to.

MRS. E.: I am Paul's mother and——

MRS. C.: I am sure no one has ever doubted that for a moment, Agnes.

MRS. E.: And I am outraged by this whole disgraceful business—my son, in his position as a public man—that he should be so shamed and humiliated, it's dreadful—dreadful—— (*She turns away to control her emotion.*)

PAUL: Look here, mother, I wish you wouldn't upset yourself like this—Mavis was right when she said I was waiting with an open mind—I am—Janet and I understand one another pretty well, you know—I trust her absolutely.

MAVIS: Splendid, Paulo.

PAUL: And I am quite convinced that when she arrives she will be able to clear up the whole affair.

MRS. E.: And what about our friends—and the public—your public!

MAVIS: It's too late to worry about that now.

MRS. C. (*helpfully*): It's like locking the something when the something or other's gone.

MRS. E.: I gather that you see nothing disgraceful in Janet's behaviour at all?

MRS. C.: Not disgraceful, Agnes—a little unwise perhaps.

MRS. E.: Has it struck you that your daughter has proclaimed herself an adulteress in the eyes of the world?

PAUL: Mother—please.

MRS. C.: Those sort of things never strikes me.

MRS. E.: Well, all I can say is that you're extremely foolish.

MRS. C.: If that is *really* all you can say, Agnes—I for one shall be very grateful!

PAUL (*with great firmness*): Look here, mother—you're only making everything very much harder for me by going on like that—it would be more just to wait and hear what Janet has to say.

MRS. E.: I fully intend to.

MRS. C.: (*not to be outdone*): So do I.

MAVIS: Would you like me to go, Paul?

PAUL: No, old thing. I should like you to stay.

MAVIS *shoots a glance of triumph at* MRS. EBONY *and* MRS. CHILHAM. PALLETT *enters.*

PALLETT: A young lady has called to see the mistress, sir.

PAUL: Who is it?

PALLETT: A Miss Hardy, sir.

PAUL: Hardy—Hardy—Do you know her, Pallett?

PALLETT: No, sir.

MRS. E.: A newspaper reporter, I expect.

PAUL: Tell her Mrs. Ebony has not come back yet and that she'd better telephone later.

PALLETT: Very good, sir.

She goes out.

MRS. E.: There now—what did I tell you? Reporters already.

MRS. C.: You exaggerate, Agnes—there is only one of her and she may not be a reporter.

MRS. E.: Who else could she be—Pallett didn't know her.

MRS. C.: It's quite possible that Janet knows a few people who have not met Pallett.

MAVIS: I think Mrs. Ebony is probably right.

Re-enter PALLETT.

PALLETT: I gave the young lady your message, sir, and she says she'll wait.

MRS. E.: Impertinence!

PAUL: Show her up here, Pallett.

MRS. E. (*protestingly*): Paul!

PALLETT: Very good, sir.

She goes out.

MAVIS: Was that wise, Paul?

PAUL: Certainly, if she is a reporter it is much better to interview her personally.

MRS. E.: Well, really—young girls nowadays seem lost to all sense of decency forcing their way into people's houses——

PAUL: She's probably only doing her job, mother.

MRS. E.: Job, indeed!

PALLETT *enters.*

PALLETT (*announcing*): Miss Hardy.

LAVINIA HARDY *enters—she is young and slim and very attractive-looking. Her manner is direct, and her*

expression at the moment almost frightening in its determination. PALLETT *goes out.*

LAVINIA (*advancing*): Mr. Ebony?

PAUL: Yes—I am Mr. Ebony.

LAVINIA (*holding out her hand*): How do you do. (*They shake hands.*) My name is Lavinia Hardy. I have come to see your wife.

PAUL: Didn't my maid explain that she has not yet returned from Paris?

LAVINIA: She said she was expected at any moment, so I said I'd wait——

PAUL: Do you know my wife?

LAVINIA: No.

MRS. E.: I knew it.

PAUL: I gather that you are a reporter, then?

LAVINIA: No, I'm not, but I wish to see your wife urgently.

PAUL: If you would leave your telephone number I will tell her when she arrives.

LAVINIA: No—I'd rather wait if you don't mind.

PAUL: Is it a business matter?

LAVINIA: No, personal—extremely personal—I happen to be Peter Chelsworth's fiancée.

PAUL (*utterly taken aback*): Oh!

MRS. C. (*stepping into the breach*): I didn't know he was engaged.

LAVINIA: I'm not sure that he is—now.

PAUL (*pulling himself together*): Would you like some tea?

LAVINIA: No, thank you.

PAUL: Cigarette?

LAVINIA: No, thank you.

PAUL: This is my mother—Mrs. Chilham and Mrs. Wittersham.

LAVINIA: How do you do.

MRS. CHILHAM *and* MRS. EBONY *bow*—MAVIS *advances and shakes hands.*

MAVIS: I gather that you are upset about the railway accident?

LAVINIA: Very.

MRS. C.: So are we all—very worrying—very worrying indeed—— (*Her voice trails off into a silence.*)

LAVINIA (*after a long pause*): I expect you all think me very rude and ill-bred, and I'm very sorry, but I can't help it.

PAUL: Not at all—not at all.

There is another long pause. PALLETT *enters with an elaborate tea on a roller table.*

MRS. C.: Tea, thank heaven—I'm dying for some.

MAVIS: So am I.

MRS. C. (*to* MRS. EBONY): Will you pour out, Agnes—or shall I?

MRS. E. (*with alacrity*): I will.

MRS. C.: Wouldn't it be dreadful to live in a country where they didn't have tea?

PAUL (*fervently*): Horrible!

MRS. E.: How many lumps, Miss Hardy?

LAVINIA (*mechanically*): Two.

MRS. E.: There. (*She hands it to her without any.*) Mavis?

MAVIS: No milk or sugar.

PAUL (*handing bread and butter to* LAVINIA): Bread and butter?

LAVINIA: No, thank you.

MRS. C.: I don't believe they do in America.

MRS. E. (*handing her tea*): Do what, Violet?

MRS. C.: Have tea.

MAVIS: I do hope it isn't going to rain.

LAVINIA (*morosely*): I don't suppose it will.

PAUL: I think it only fair to tell you, Miss Hardy, that we haven't the least idea what time Janet is arriving.

LAVINIA: You are all waiting for her, aren't you?

MRS. C.: Yes—we are.

LAVINIA: Then I will too—but if having a stranger here embarrasses you, perhaps I could go into another room.

PAUL: Not at all—stay here by all means.

LAVINIA: Thank you.

MRS. C.: It may be impertinent of me, but I should very much like to know why you are so determined to see my daughter.

LAVINIA: I want to see for myself whether there is anything between her and Peter. I am very fond of Peter, although I haven't seen him for two years—but I quite realise that this woman (*to* MRS. CHILHAM) your daughter—has been in his life a good deal—Peter might lie to me and convince me, but she couldn't. I should know in a minute.

MRS. E.: I admire your courage, Miss Hardy.

LAVINIA: It isn't courage—it's just squaring up to things quickly before they get too big for you.

MRS. C.: You are very young.

There is a loud knocking heard at the front door downstairs—MAVIS *goes to the window.*

PAUL: Janet.

MAVIS: Yes, it sounds like her. (*Looking out of the window.*) It is.

MRS. E.: It's unnecessary to hammer the door like that.

PAUL: I'm going down.

MRS. E.: No, Paul, stay here—control yourself—you're not a schoolboy.

JANET *enters. She is charmingly dressed and very gay. She looks slightly surprised at seeing so many people.*

JANET (*kissing* PAUL): Paul dear—we needn't overdo this—need we—we've only been parted a week.

PAUL: Well, Janet—I'm glad you're all right.

JANET (*kissing* MRS. CHILHAM): It was terrifying—— Thank heaven Peter was with me——

LAVINIA: It was true then?

JANET (*turning in surprise*): Paul—I——

PAUL: This is Miss Hardy.

JANET: How do you do— (*She approaches* MRS. EBONY.) Hallo, mother-in-law. (MRS. EBONY *turns away and refuses to kiss her.*) What's the matter?

MAVIS (*advancing and kissing her warmly*): Welcome home, Janet.

JANET: Mavis! What a fright you gave me. I never saw you—you must have been in the shadow or something.

LAVINIA: Peter Chelsworth was sharing a wagon-lit with you then?

JANET: Yes—he'll tell you all about it when he comes up —he's just paying the taxi.

LAVINIA (*bursting into violent tears*): Oh, oh, oh!

JANET (*astounded*): What on earth is wrong?

LAVINIA (*hysterically*): Very clever—very clever indeed, but you can't deceive me—you're wicked and horrible, and I wish I were dead!

She flings herself into a chair sobbing.

JANET: The poor girl's mad as a hatter.

MAVIS (*sweetly*): She's engaged to Peter, you know, dear—that's why she's a little upset.

JANET: Hardy—of course, Lavinia Hardy.

PETER CHELSWORTH *enters, he is nice-looking and extremely debonair.*

PAUL (*advancing*): Hullo, Peter.

They shake hands.

JANET: Peter——

PETER: Yes?

JANET (*pointing to* LAVINIA): You'd better do something about that.

PETER: Good God, Lavinia. (*He goes towards her.*)

LAVINIA: Don't come near me—don't touch me.

PETER: Lavvy—don't be such an ass.

LAVINIA: You didn't expect to find me here, did you?

PETER: Lavvy—listen——

LAVINIA (*wildly*): I won't listen—I'm making a fool of myself, I know, but I can't help it. I wanted to carry this off with a high hand and not show that I minded, but I do mind—I mind terribly—I don't ever want to see you or speak to you again—the way you both arrive together

brazenly—belonging to one another. How could you—how could you—how could you!

She runs out of the door and slams the door after her. In the pause that ensues the front door is also heard to bang.

JANET: Will you give me some tea, please? I feel rather shattered.

PETER: I say, I'm most awfully sorry.

JANET: You mustn't worry, Peter—I'm sure she'll calm down later on.

MRS. E.: These outspoken modern young girls seem to me to have very little stamina.

PAUL: Don't be unkind, mother.

JANET: Do sit down, Peter dear—you look so lost standing about.

PETER: I haven't said how d'you do to anybody yet, and now it seems to be too late.

JANET: In moments of stress how d'you do's are merely cumbersome.

PETER: I should like some tea, too.

JANET: Good.

There is a pause.

PETER: I'm not sure that I ought to stay at all.

JANET: I would rather you did.

PETER: All right.

There is another pause.

PAUL: Janet——

JANET: Yes, dear?

PAUL (*turning away*): Nothing.

JANET: The atmosphere seems slightly oppressive—— Could someone open the window?

PAUL *does so.*

MRS. E. (*opening the offensive*): Did you expect it to be anything but oppressive?

JANET: I don't understand.

PAUL: Look here, mother, I wish you'd leave this to me.

JANET: Leave what to you?

PAUL: It is between Janet and me.

MAVIS: Janet and Mr. Chelsworth and you.

JANET: I understand now—don't you, Peter?

PETER (*helping himself to a cake*): Perfectly.

MRS. E.: So I should think.

JANET: If anybody is cross I shall giggle.

MRS. E.: We are waiting for an explanation.

JANET: Go on, Peter.

PETER: I can't—my mouth's full.

JANET (*quickly*): So is mine. (*She takes a large bite of bread-and-butter.*)

MRS. E.: This is no moment for flippancy, Janet.

PAUL: Mother's right, you know, Janet.

JANET: No, she isn't—she's quite, quite wrong.

MRS. E.: I suppose you realise what you've done.

JANET: I realise what you think I've done.

MRS. E.: You've compromised yourself before the whole world.

JANET: Nonsense!

PETER: Look here, Mrs. Ebony—I think you're jumping to conclusions rather too quickly.

JANET (*dangerously*): Don't argue with them, Peter, they're set on sin.

MRS. C.: The whole thing is very, very unfortunate.

JANET: You, too, mother—I'm ashamed of you.

MRS. E.: Why were you and Mr. Chelsworth sharing a wagon-lit?

JANET: Because the train was crowded. I had a double compartment and Peter hadn't one at all.

MRS. C.: Why hadn't he?

PETER: I had to start with, but there was a muddle about the tickets, and an old lady got in at Marseilles and wrested it from me.

JANET: She had four suitcases, a solar topee, and a parrot.

PETER: And a strangely tropical temperament.

JANET: Peter suddenly became tremendously old-world and chivalrous, and gave in without a murmur, and then as it seemed ridiculous for him to spend a miserable night in the corridor when I had a perfectly good extra berth in my compartment—he joined me.

MRS. E.: You're quite sure you didn't arrange to share a compartment before you left Cannes?

JANET: I consider that remark impertinent, vulgar, and unfortunately typical.

MRS. E.: How dare you!

JANET: Paul—you ought to arrange for your mother to remain permanently in the country.

MRS. E. (*rising*): I will not be spoken to like this.

JANET: This is my house. (*She laughs.*) Anyhow until the divorce.

PAUL: Janet!

JANET: Surely you are going to divorce me, Paul.

MRS. C.: Janet, darling—how can you say such terrible things!

JANET: Now, listen. Peter and I have both been in a very bad railway accident, and not one of you here has displayed the faintest sign of relief at our practically miraculous escape from death—lots of people were killed and lots injured, and our carriage was telescoped and broken to bits—I was jammed in my bunk and when it turned over I was able to climb out through the window. I couldn't see Peter anywhere—he was in the upper berth when the crash came—I wandered up and down the line in pyjamas and bare feet calling to him; finally, after about an hour when I was perished with cold and crying hopelessly, I found him lying with both legs pinned under a piece of wreckage and to give an added thrill to your prurient minds it may comfort you to know that his pyjama trousers have not yet been found.

MRS. E.: Janet!

JANET: But apparently it never struck you that we'd both been in grave danger and suffered a severe nervous shock—your minds were so obsessed with the time-worn belief that no two people of opposite sexes can be together in night attire without—oh!

MRS. C.: Janet darling, please.

PAUL: Janet, don't talk like that.

MRS. E.: You're disgusting.

JANET: You lie in wait for me and demand explanations like a lot of parish spinsters cross-examining a housemaid

—and you, Paul, calmly stand by and allow it—I suppose ou suspect the worst, too.

PAUL: Look here, Janet, I——

JANET: Well, if you do you're perfectly right—Peter and are lovers, aren't we, Peter?

PETER (*staggered*): What, dear?

JANET: I say we are lovers, aren't we?

PETER (*rising gallantly*): Certainly.

JANET: Peter adores me, don't you, Peter?

PETER: Passionately.

JANET: There now!

MRS. C. (*going to her*): Janet—Janet, how can you?

JANET: Go home, mother.

PETER (*warming up*): I've always loved Janet—madly—he used to visit me in Egypt.

MRS. E.: What!

PETER: In dreams.

MAVIS: You're a very clever woman, Janet. I admire ou more than I can say.

JANET: Thank you, Mavis.

MAVIS: And I want you to understand that whatever appens, I am your friend.

JANET: Good.

MAVIS: You've got courage, and I like courage.

JANET: I'm so glad.

MRS. C.: Janet, darling, it isn't true, say it isn't true.

JANET: It's perfectly true—everything is true if you elieve hard enough—I should like you to go away now nd take Paul's mother with you.

MRS. E.: I'm sure I have no wish to stay.

JANET: Then we're all satisfied, aren't we?

PAUL: I'll see you down, mother.

MRS. C. (*appealingly*): Janet——

JANET (*firmly*): Go away.

MAVIS: I'm going, too.

JANET: Well, you can't grumble—you've seen the best of it.

MAVIS (*ignoring her*): Telephone me, Paul—if you need me.

She goes out, followed by MRS. EBONY, MRS CHILHAM *and* PAUL. JANET *hands* PETER *a cigarette and takes one herself.*

JANET: I'm sorry, Peter. I couldn't help it.

PETER: God knows they asked for it.

JANET: It's beastly about Lavinia.

PETER: Yes, it is rather—but she often has flare-ups—and she's no fool really.

JANET: You think she'll get over it?

PETER: Don't let's talk about her. Your troubles seem more urgent at the moment.

JANET: I'm afraid I've compromised you badly.

PETER: Who cares! Do you think Paul believes we're having an affair, too?

JANET: No—he couldn't be so silly——

PETER: Let me know what happens, won't you?

JANET: Of course.

PETER: I think I'd better be going.

JANET: All right.

PETER: It's extraordinary, isn't it, how much easier it would be if we really were lovers?

JANET: Perhaps—but not so cosy.

PETER (*laughing*): Quite. (*He goes to the door and meets* PAUL *coming in.*) I'm going now, Paul—good-bye.

PAUL (*stiffly*): Good-bye.

PETER *raises his eyebrows slightly and goes out.*

PAUL: Well, Janet?

JANET: Well?

PAUL: I'm sorry about all that—I couldn't help the mothers coming.

JANET: Never mind.

PAUL: It's a pretty beastly situation, isn't it?

JANET: Is it?

PAUL: Don't you think so?

JANET: No—tiresome perhaps, but not beastly.

PAUL: I'll stand by you, you know.

JANET: Stand by me?

PAUL: Until you've decided what you want to do.

JANET: Paul! (*She comes over to him.*)

PAUL: Yes?

JANET: You don't seriously believe that Peter and I are having an affair?

PAUL (*gently*): I'm not quite an idiot.

JANET: Well, really!

PAUL: I'd rather you had been more honest with me—before.

JANET: Paul!

PAUL: I should have understood, you know, and we

could have talked things over, and all this unpleasantness might have been avoided.

JANET: You mean that if I had come to you in Cannes and confessed my scorching passion for Peter, you would have been perfectly amiable about it.

PAUL: Naturally—— Those sort of things just happen—I don't believe in making scenes—much more can be achieved by sense and understanding.

JANET (*going into fits of laughter*): Incredible.

PAUL: Janet——

JANET (*laughing more*): Wonderful! Oh, dear—oh, dear!

PAUL: Janet, stop acting.

JANET (*weakly*): This is not acting—it's whole-hearted—quite, quite whole-hearted——Oh, dear——

PAUL (*almost angrily*): Janet, stop! This is no laughing matter.

JANET: It is—oh, it is—— (*She goes on laughing.*)

PAUL: You're hysterical—I'm not surprised.

JANET (*controlling herself*): I'm sorry, Paul—but you see I'm rather bewildered—I've got to convince you of my complete innocence and I don't know how. (*She goes off into gales of laughter again.*)

PAUL: Mavis was right—you are damned clever.

JANET (*pulling herself together again*): Now listen to me, Paul.

PAUL: I don't want any lies, Janet—I want the truth.

JANET: If you look at me like that I shall laugh again.

PAUL: Please control yourself.

JANET: Paul, I should like to tell you that I have known Peter for many years, we are intimate friends and never—

ven in the beginning with all the hectic beastliness of the ar all around us, have I had the faintest feeling for him ther than friendship—and he feels exactly the same about ne. And now if you will forgive me, I shall go and have a ath. I feel I need it after the journey and your mother's onversation.

PAUL: You've hurt me more than I can say.

JANET: Because I say your mother's mind needs airing?

PAUL: No.

JANET: Why then?

PAUL: Because you don't trust me.

JANET: What on earth are you talking about?

PAUL: You know—perfectly well.

JANET: You think I'm lying to you?

PAUL: I know you are, my dear—and it hurts.

JANET: How do you know?

PAUL: Now, Janet——

JANET: If what you're believing were true, and I was nfaithful to you—you'd forgive me?

PAUL: Of course—things like that happen—it isn't anyody's fault.

JANET: You're forgiving me now?

PAUL (*smiling*): Yes—freely—all I want to know is hat you'd like to do about it—it's an awkward situation nd needs thinking out.

JANET: And talking over?

PAUL: Certainly.

JANET: Thinking out and talking over—not emotionally, f course—coolly and sensibly.

PAUL: Naturally.

JANET: I see. (*She goes to the fireplace, picks up the poker and brings it to him.*) Here—give me a whack with that, will you?

PAUL: Don't be foolish.

JANET: It would relieve you of your inhibitions and me of the growing realisation that you are nothing more or less than a prig.

PAUL (*shocked*): Janet!

JANET: Yes, prig! (*She flings the poker across the room.*) You forgive me, do you? You wish to know what I want to do about the situation? Well, I'll tell you—I'm leaving you, Paul—this minute.

PAUL: Janet!

JANET: Yes, and when I come back—if I ever do come back—you're going to have a good deal more to forgive than you ever bargained for!

She goes out swiftly and bangs the door.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The scene is PETER CHELSWORTH'S *flat in St. James's. The left wall has three windows overlooking the Park. At the back are double doors opening into a lobby and thence to the front door. On the right up stage there is a door leading into the kitchen and lower down another door leading to* PETER'S *bedroom.*

The following morning.

When the curtain rises, TURNER *is putting the finishing touches to the breakfast table—the telephone rings.* TURNER *goes to it.*

TURNER (*at telephone*): Hallo—Yes, sir—No, sir, not et, sir—Oh, yes, sir, wide awake—She's had her bath, sir —I'll tell her, sir—Very good, sir. (*He hangs up the receiver nd goes over to the bedroom door. He taps gently.*) Mr. Chels- vorth has just telephoned, ma'am—he says he's coming traight round and will you start breakfast.

JANET (*in bedroom*): Thanks, Turner—I shan't be a inute.

TURNER: Very good, ma'am.

He goes into the kitchen. After a moment's pause, JANET *comes out of the bedroom. She is wearing a charming négligé. She goes over to the window, looks out, then with a little sigh of satisfaction seats herself at the table.* TURNER *re-enters with coffee.*

JANET: It seems a lovely day, Turner.

TURNER: I shouldn't wonder if it didn't get a bit stormy later on, ma'am.

JANET: Neither should I.

TURNER: Would you like bacon and eggs after your grape fruit, ma'am? Or eggs without bacon; or bacon without eggs?

JANET: I suppose there aren't any sausages, are there?

TURNER: No, ma'am, I'm afraid not.

JANET: Bacon then, please, Turner.

TURNER: Very good, ma'am.

JANET: Have the morning papers come?

TURNER: Yes, ma'am—here they are. (*He hands her papers.*)

JANET: Thank you. (*She opens one.*) Ah!

TURNER: Nice big 'eadlines, aren't they, ma'am?

JANET: Yes—very gratifying. (*Reading.*) 'Wife of celebrated novelist has miraculous escape.' How true. (*She laughs and pours out some coffee.*) Have any more reporters rung up this morning, Turner?

TURNER: No, ma'am—you 'ad all the 'dailies' last night.

JANET: Do you think there will be any more?

TURNER: The 'weeklies' might want one or two photographs, ma'am.

JANET: I must have some taken—with Mr. Chelsworth.

TURNER: There's a wonderful story in the 'Mail,' ma'am.

JANET: Oh, where?

TURNER (*finding it*): 'Ere—was it all true about you having a presentiment before the accident happened?

JANET: Entirely, Turner. I had the most peculiar feeling just after dinner.

TURNER: Well, ma'am, there are more things in 'eaven and earth, you know.

JANET: Far more, Turner.

TURNER: Yes, ma'am.

He goes off into the kitchen. JANET *props the paper up in front of her and begins to eat her grape fruit—occasionally she gives a little chuckle. There is the noise of the front door being opened with a latch-key, then* PETER *enters; he puts his hat and stick down in a corner.*

PETER: Good morning, Janet.

JANET: Peter, darling—you're a bit late.

PETER: The damned hotel people never called me.

JANET: I was terrified that mother or Paul or somebody would arrive and catch me without your immoral support.

PETER: Has Turner looked after you all right?

JANET: Perfectly—he's sweet. Have you seen the papers?

PETER: Only the 'Mirror'—I read it in the taxi.

JANET: The 'Mail's' lovely—full of drama. (*She hands it to him.*)

PETER: Thanks. (*He reads it.*)

JANET (*pouring coffee*): Half and half?

PETER: Yes, please. (*He laughs.*) I love this bit about me crying for water.

JANET: I find it very winning myself.

PETER: Let's have a look at the 'Telegraph.'

JANET (*handing it to him*): It's practically the same.

PETER: Did you sleep well?

JANET: Not at all, dear, thank you.

PETER: Neither did I.

JANET: I was worrying about you more than anything —you've been awfully gallant and chivalrous and sweet over the whole thing, but I can't help feeling I'm letting you in for a lot of trouble.

PETER: Nonsense. We're both in the same boat.

JANET: Yes, but I seem to be rocking it rather unnecessarily.

PETER: Never mind.

JANET: Last night when I left Paul, I was in such a blind rage that I turned to you instinctively. I felt I couldn't face being alone—and then we dined and got the giggles, and rang up all those reporters and enjoyed ourselves thoroughly, and now we're well embarked on our plan, and I'm feeling slightly apprehensive.

PETER: It's a grand plan—let's enjoy it.

JANET: It's Lavinia who is troubling me.

PETER: Lavinia behaved abominably—I'm furious with her—just as furious as you are with Paul—perhaps more.

JANET: Because you're in love with her.

PETER: I expect so.

JANET: Well, I can't stay here after to-day—that's certain.

PETER: You can stay here as long as ever you like—I've no intention of having a reconciliation with Lavinia until she comes to her senses.

JANET: Poor dear—I see her point a little, you know.

PETER: I don't—she knows we've been friends for years —I've discussed you with her often—she's no right to

jump to wrong conclusions—what's the use of loving somebody and believing the worst of them at the first opportunity?

JANET: That's one of the penalties of loving somebody.

PETER: She's so clear-minded as a rule.

JANET (*rising and turning away*): I'm afraid I've been over-impulsive and rather stupid.

PETER: I understand, my dear—and I forgive you freely.

JANET: Shut up, Peter.

PETER: I do—I forgive everybody.

JANET: Don't laugh at me—I'm serious.

PETER: Are you, Janet?

JANET: Aren't you?

PETER: Perhaps—inside.

JANET: It's better for me—I'm not in love with Paul.

PETER: Not even a little?

JANET: Not a scrap. I'm beginning to doubt that I'm even fond of him.

PETER: I've always found him a bit heavy, but I thought that was because he was a novelist.

JANET: Some novelists are as light as air.

PETER: I should think Mavis what's her name was uncommonly bad for him.

JANET: They've been soul-mates for years—they're always being big about things, both of them. It's very wearing.

PETER: Is she in love with him?

JANET: I expect so, but they're so occupied in being comrades and understanding one another that it's kept in the background.

PETER: Poor thing—More coffee, dear, please.

JANET (*pouring*): It's a strange feeling this, isn't it?

PETER: Extremely.

JANET: A sort of filtered living in sin.

PETER: I still feel slightly dazed—our homecoming was rather bewildering.

JANET: Aren't people's minds frightful? Think of that room full of people yesterday, all well-born and well-bred and carefully brought up—all perfectly convinced that we shared a wagon-lit entirely for immoral purposes—unable to imagine any other angle on the situation, but just that —man—you—woman—me—result obvious. Oh, dear, it is depressing, isn't it?

PETER: Yes, but quite inevitable.

TURNER *enters with the bacon.*

TURNER: Will you be in to lunch, sir?

PETER: Shall we, Janet?

JANET: No—let's lunch out—we might have a large double bed wheeled into the Ritz Grill.

PETER: We'll lunch out, Turner.

TURNER: Very good, sir. (*He goes out.*)

PETER: We ought to have married really and treated love as a thing apart—like a sort of side-show—whenever we felt like it.

JANET: Lovely theory, dear—and so practical.

PETER: It would be really.

JANET: What about Lavinia?

PETER: Damn Lavinia.

JANET: She wouldn't consent to having an affair with you without marriage and you wouldn't want her to.

PETER: We're all too Victorian—that's what it is.

JANET: I wish somebody loved me.

PETER: Cheer up, dear—you've still got a year or two to go.

JANET: If anybody did—I'd live with him immediately—without a qualm.

PETER: No, you wouldn't—you'd hate it—you're not that sort.

JANET (*flinging her arms out*): I am—I am—I'm a courtesan at heart—I should like to sweep in and out of continental casinos hung with illicit pearls and never stop being manicured and have rich old gentlemen dancing attendance on me and conduct secret liaisons with sleek professional dancers——(*She laughs.*) God! Doesn't it sound awful!

PETER: There you are, you see.

JANET: Oh, Peter, what *am* I to do?

PETER: It's all very difficult. You might go on the stage as a last resource!—lots of people do.

JANET: Obviously.

PETER: Poor Janet.

JANET: Poor Peter. (*Suddenly the front door bell rings loudly.*) There, now——

PETER: We're off, I think—play up.

TURNER *comes out of kitchen and goes to open front door.*

JANET: One minute, Turner—(*to* PETER)—Come into the bedroom quickly.

PETER (*rising*): All right.

JANET: Whoever it is, Turner—show them in here.

TURNER: Very good, ma'am.

PETER *and* JANET *go into the bedroom and close the door.* TURNER *vanishes into the lobby and presently returns ushering in* MRS. CHILHAM *and* MRS. EBONY.

TURNER: Mr. Chelsworth will be here in a moment, ma'am.

MRS. E.: Isn't he here now?

TURNER: He's in the bedroom dressing, ma'am.

MRS. E.: Thank you.

TURNER *goes out.* MRS. EBONY *eyes the breakfast table.*

MRS. E.: She's here—there are two of everything.

MRS. C.: I expect Peter has his brother staying with him.

MRS. E.: Nonsense, Violet.

MRS. C.: I hope you're not going to start the day by being domineering, Agnes. If I'd known you were coming to see Mr. Chelsworth, too, I should have got here earlier.

MRS. E.: Why?

MRS. C.: Because he is not the sort of young man who will stand being blackguarded.

MRS. E.: He ought to be horse-whipped.

MRS. C.: There you go again.

MRS. E.: An utter cad—to make love to a woman while her husband's away.

MRS. C.: It would be worse taste to do it while he was there, wouldn't it?

MRS. E.: It's infamous—the whole thing.

MRS. C.: Shall we sit down?

MRS. E.: No.

MRS. C.: Why not?

MRS. E.: Because it looks silly.

MRS. C.: No sillier than standing up.

MRS. E.: We're here to talk to this young man seriously.

MRS. C.: Very well, Agnes.

MRS. E.: And Janet.

MRS. C.: Janet isn't here.

MRS. E.: She is.

MRS. C.: She is not—it's not the sort of thing she'd do.

MRS. E.: Janet's a dark horse—I've always known it.

MRS. C.: How dare you, Agnes!

MRS. E.: I shall never forgive her, all this abominable vulgarity.

She brandishes a newspaper.

MRS. C.: You will kindly remember that Janet is my daughter, not yours, and if anybody's not going to forgive her, *I'm* not.

Suddenly from the bedroom there comes a little cry.

JANET (*off*): Peter—Peter——

MRS. E.: What did I tell you!

MRS. C.: Oh, dear—oh, dear!

MRS. E.: That is the bedroom.

MRS. C.: It's terrible—terrible——

JANET (*off*): Peter—you're so wonderful—your arms are so strong.

PETER (*off*): No, they're not—they're weak as matches.

JANET: No, no—they're strong—wind them round me.

PETER (*fondly*): Janet—Janet—silly little Janet.

MRS. E.: Well, really!

MRS. C.: I don't think we ought to be here, Agnes.

MRS. E. (*ominously*): I do.

PETER: Our love has isolated us from the world—the common, vulgar world—we're alone as though we were on a desert island—just you and me.

JANET: You and I, dear.

PETER: Just you and I.

MRS. C.: We must do something, Agnes.

MRS. E.: It's disgraceful—disgusting——

MRS. C.: We must make a noise.

JANET: Peter—Peter—kiss me—again—again—Ah!

Her voice trails off.

MRS. C. (*flinging a cup on to the floor*): There!

There is a silence for a moment, then JANET *enters. She starts visibly upon seeing* MRS. EBONY *and* MRS. CHILHAM, *then closing the bedroom door carefully behind her she advances with a great show of sang-froid.*

JANET (*kissing* MRS. CHILHAM): My dears—what a delightful surprise. (*She turns to* MRS. EBONY). Mother-in-law——

MRS. E. (*moving away as though contaminated*): Don't come near me.

JANET: Isn't it a glorious morning—I feel so fresh and rejuvenated.

MRS. E.: I'm exceedingly surprised to hear it.

MRS. C.: Oh, Janet—Janet—what can I say to you?

JANET: How did you know I was here?

MRS. E.: We guessed it without much difficulty.

JANET: Wasn't it sweet of Peter to lend me his flat—he's gone to Scotland, you know.

MRS. C.: Oh, Janet.

MRS. E. (*snorting*): Oh!

JANET (*blithely*): He has several very intimate friends
n Scotland.

MRS. E.: Stop lying, Janet.

JANET: I don't know what you mean.

MRS. E.: If Mr. Chelsworth is in Scotland—why are
here two places laid?

JANET: I'm expecting Mrs. James Trappit to breakfast.

MRS. C.: Mrs. James Trappit—Oh, Janet——

JANET: You don't mean to tell me you've never heard
f Madeleine Trappit—really that's too amusing.

She laughs affectedly. PETER, *with his hair ruffled and in a dressing-gown over his suit, rushes in.*

PETER: Have they gone, darling? Oh!

He rushes back and slams the door.

MRS. C. (*bursting into tears*): Thank heaven your poor
ather didn't live to see this.

JANET: Judging from what I remember of father, I
ould think he'd have enjoyed it thoroughly.

MRS. E.: Have you lost all sense of decency?

JANET: Yes—every scrap.

MRS. E.: I'm completely at a loss—words fail me.

JANET: Well, that's something achieved, isn't it?

MRS. C.: I've often thought you impulsive and unwise
ut never downright wicked——

MRS. E.: If my son divorces you, is that young man
repared to marry you?

JANET: Well, not at the moment—you see there's a
lack woman he's very much in love with, but if Paul

wouldn't mind waiting a few weeks, I might find someone else to take me off his hands.

MRS. E.: What is your object in all this?

JANET: Freedom! Mental, moral, and physical freedom —I am striking off the chains that have shackled me for so long—I have suddenly come to realise that I am a woman —a living, passionate, pulsating woman—you know it never occurred to me before.

MRS. E.: You've taken leave of your senses.

JANET (*dramatically*): No, no—I've found them—for the first time—I live now only for my senses—Peter plays upon my senses as though I were a harp—it's most enjoyable.

MRS. E. (*losing control*): You're a shameless vile woman!

MRS. C.: Agnes—don't speak like that.

MRS. E.: You wish to drag my son's name in the gutter——!

MRS. C. (*furiously*): Stop! I will not allow you to say such things.

MRS. E. (*beside herself*): I've always known it—I've always felt it in my bones—you're rotten through and through——

MRS. C.: And so is Paul—allowing that Mavis Wittersham to hang round his neck all day long.

JANET: Bravo, mother.

MRS. C.: A blind cat could see that she's trying to get him away from Janet—all that talk about how fond she is of him and not liking to see him let down—she'll let him down all right if he gives her the chance—and he will—he's that sort of man—weak as water.

MRS. E.: Weak as water—my son!

MRS. C.: Yes, and pompous—far too pompous, he drives
ie mad, and he drives Janet mad, and that's why she left
im—pompous—pompous—pompous.

JANET: Oh, mother, you darling.

MRS. E.: You're only trying to blacken Paul's character
o bring him down to Janet's level, but you can't do it—
ot as low as that.

MRS. C.: I thought you were clever once, Agnes, and
orldly and I admired you—but now I see you in your
ue colours—you're a harridan!

MRS. E. (*outraged*): What?

MRS. C.: Harridan—a dreadful old woman!

MRS. E.: This is insupportable!

She marches out of the flat. JANET *collapses into a chair laughing helplessly*—MRS. CHILHAM *strides about.*

MRS. C.: Stop laughing, Janet——

JANET: I can't—you were terribly funny.

MRS. C.: I couldn't stand by and let her abuse you.

JANET: It was splendid of you, darling—(*She laughs gain.*)—Oh, dear!

MRS. C.: Now then—what are we going to do?

JANET: I gather that you're on my side.

MRS. C.: We've got to think of a way to get you out of
is terrible position—you must go back to Paul imme-
ately.

JANET: What!

MRS. C.: It's your house after all, and if anybody's going
leave it—he must.

JANET (*smiling*): I never thought of that.

MRS. C.: But the best thing is for you to promise never to see Peter again and ask Paul to forgive you.

JANET: I left him because he forgave me.

MRS. C.: Nonsense—you left him because you've got a mania for Peter—you can't throw dust in my eyes.

JANET: Mother!

MRS. C.: If you must be unfaithful to Paul why on earth can't you do it nicely and secretly instead of shouting it from the housetops like this—it's shameful of you.

JANET: Do you *still* believe I'm in love with Peter?

MRS. C.: That is neither here nor there, Janet.

JANET: You're wrong—it's both here and there—What do you mean by it?

MRS. C.: What do I mean by what?

JANET: What do you mean by first of all believing that I'm an adulteress and secondly by advising me to be immoral secretly!

MRS. C.: Janet, how can you—I never advised any such thing.

JANET: You did—and it's shocked me more than I can say.

MRS. C.: You're hopeless, Janet—perfectly hopeless.

JANET: I thought when you were standing up for me to Paul's mother, that you really understood the whole thing, but I see now I was wrong—you don't understand any more than she does—you're just as convinced as she is that Peter and I took that beastly sleeping car together on purpose and that we're living here in flaming sin.

MRS. C.: I may live in the country, Janet, but I'm a woman of the world.

JANET: No, you're not, dear—you're just a thoroughly nice old lady who reads too many library books.

MRS. C.: Now listen to me, Janet.

JANET: I'm not going to listen to you any more—you put very bad ideas into my head. Go away, mother——

MRS. C.: But, Janet——

JANET (*pushes her gently towards the door*): Go away at once—this is entirely my affair and I intend to deal with it in my own way.

MRS. C.: How can you be so unkind?

JANET: Good-bye, mother—I'll write to you from the red-lamp district or wherever it is my next lover takes me.

She takes her into the lobby still protesting and pushes her out of the front door, which she closes firmly and returns into the room.

(*Calling*): It's all right, Peter.

PETER *comes in from the bedroom. He has discarded the dressing-gown and his hair is no longer ruffled.*

PETER: Well?

JANET: That was a howling success.

PETER: What did they say?

JANET: Everything.

PETER: I heard Mrs. Ebony's exit. I couldn't very well help it.

JANET: I feel awful, Peter. Mother let down badly, she suggested that I should go back to Paul and ask him to forgive me, and if I must have an affair with you, I was to do it secretly.

PETER: I don't know what these modern old things are coming to with their nasty loose thoughts.

JANET: Give me a cigarette—I need fumigating.

PETER: Here. (*He hands her one and takes one himself.*)

JANET: Peter, Peter, your arms are so strong—wind them round me——

PETER (*dreamily*): Round and round and round——

There is another loud ring at the front door.

JANET: Oh, Peter—we can't go through it all again..

PETER: You'd better sit on my knee, I think.

JANET (*wearily*): Very well.

TURNER *enters.*

PETER: Whoever it is, Turner—show them in.

TURNER: Yes, sir.

JANET *arranges herself on* PETER'S *knee.* TURNER *ushers in* ALEC STONE. *He is a nice-looking man of about thirty-five. He starts violently on seeing* JANET *and* PETER.

ALEC: Peter!—I say I'm most frightfully sorry.

He turns to go.

JANET (*rising hurriedly*): Oh, dear.

PETER (*laughing*): This is awful. Don't go, Alec, for heaven's sake.

ALEC (*dreadfully embarrassed*): I'd no idea—I——

PETER: It's all right—really it is—Mrs. Ebony—Major Stone.

JANET (*grandly*): How do you do?

ALEC (*shaking hands*): You really must forgive me for bursting in like that—but Turner said it was all right——

PETER: We told him to let anybody in.

JANET: We're expecting my husband really.

ALEC: Your husband?

JANET: Yes, we're teaching him a lesson—it's a very complicated story—Tell him, Peter.

PETER: Don't look so embarrassed, Alec—It's all perfectly in order—Janet and I are in no way in love with each other—our relationship is completely respectable, but everyone is determined that it isn't and it's annoyed us.

ALEC: Oh!

JANET (*breathlessly*): We were sharing a wagon-lit because Peter hadn't anywhere to sleep and there was an accident——

ALEC: I know—I've read the papers.

JANET: And when we got home yesterday—everyone was foul—and Lavinia went for Peter and all my relations went for me, and finally my husband started forgiving me for what I'd done, and as I'd done nothing I left the house and came here, and Peter went to an hotel and—I know it sounds silly, but it's true.

ALEC (*laughing*): All right—I believe you.

JANET: Do you honestly—or are you only pretending?

ALEC: Honestly—to begin with I know Peter pretty well, and he's generally extremely retiring about his love affairs, and also my instincts tell me that two lovers seldom remain clasped in one another's arms, in broad daylight, with the front door bell ringing.

JANET: They might.

ALEC: Not if they're guilty lovers.

PETER: Do you want some coffee or anything?

ALEC: No, thanks—I only just dropped in to welcome

you back and ask you to lunch. (*To* JANET.) Won't you come and lunch, too?

JANET: Well—it's very sweet of you—I—(*She looks at him for a moment and then turns away*)—Peter?

PETER: I'd love to, Alec.

JANET: So should I.

ALEC: Splendid!—Shall we lunch noisily or quietly?

JANET: Oh, quietly.

ALEC: How long are you continuing this purity campaign of yours?

PETER: I don't know—Janet?

JANET: I don't know—until something happens, I suppose.

ALEC: What could happen?

JANET: Well—I suppose Paul will arrive and—well, it will make him very cross—and oh, I don't know. (*She finishes rather lamely.*)

ALEC: I understand perfectly.

JANET (*quickly*): You don't approve?

ALEC: It's no affair of mine.

JANET: But you don't, do you?

ALEC: Well, it rather shocks me to see an obviously charming woman deliberately compromising herself.

JANET: Oh, Peter—send him away.

ALEC: I'm sorry—but you did ask me.

PETER: You're damping us, Alec.

ALEC: Never mind—it's only an opinion.

JANET (*in businesslike tones*): Look here—don't you think we're justified?

ALEC: Justified in what?

JANET: Doing what we're doing.

ALEC: What are you doing exactly?

JANET: Well, we're just—just giving their nasty minds omething to grind on, aren't we, Peter?

PETER: Oh, yes—like anything.

ALEC: With what object?

PETER: Janet?

JANET: I don't know.

ALEC: Well, I must go now—will you meet me at the Guards' Club—Ladies' entrance, at one o'clock.

PETER: But, Alec——

JANET: You can't leave us like this—having upset us horoughly.

ALEC: I'm afraid I must—we'll talk everything over at unch—Good-bye.

He bows politely and goes out. PETER *and* JANET *sit and stare at one another.*

JANET: What a horrible man—I *do* like him.

PETER: He's a brute—I've known him for years

JANET: Married?

PETER: Divorced.

JANET: Whose fault?

PETER: Hers.

JANET: Do you think he liked me?

PETER: Yes, Janet.

JANET: Much?

PETER: Don't be ridiculous, Janet.

JANET: I think I must be psychic, you know, because he moment he walked into the room the strangest feeling ame over me.

PETER: Alec has that effect on women.

JANET: What a beastly thing to say.

PETER: Janet—What's the matter with you?

JANET (*thoughtfully*): We must stop all this.

PETER: All what?

JANET: All this stupid plan of ours—he was quite right—it's only cheapening us and leading nowhere.

PETER: Grand fun, though, in a way.

JANET: Not really—we're too angry inside for it to be grand fun. Let's stop it.

PETER: What are you going to do?

JANET: I'll go back to Paul.

PETER: That'll be nice.

JANET: I'll talk to him seriously—he can divorce me or something.

PETER: You forget he's a man of honour.

JANET: Well, then, he can let me divorce him—it might be bad for his career, but I can't help that.

PETER: He could marry Mavis Wittersham.

JANET: That would be worse for his career.

PETER: Has he got a career?

JANET: No—I'm going to dress.

She goes into the bedroom. PETER *flings himself into a chair and begins to read the paper. There comes a ring at the door bell.* TURNER *goes through to answer it. He ushers in* LAVINIA *and goes back into the kitchen.*

LAVINIA: Peter ! (*She runs to him.*) Peter, I've been such an utter idiot——

PETER: You have rather.

LAVINIA: I couldn't telephone or anything—I had to

ome round to ask you to forgive me. I cried all night, not nly because I made such a fool of myself yesterday, but ecause I'd been counting the days until you came home, nd then everything was spoilt, and oh, I do love you so.

She buries her head on his shoulder.

PETER: That's all right, Lavvy.

LAVINIA: You've got to forgive me.

PETER: I won't, darling——

LAVINIA: Peter!

PETER (*looking apprehensively towards the bedroom door*): Forgiveness is a bad thing—it leads to trouble.

LAVINIA: Don't you love me any more?

PETER: Yes.

LAVINIA: I trust you completely—it was only the shock f you and Mrs. Ebony being in Cannes together and then n the accident together, and then arriving together—I now I was all wrong, but you must understand.

PETER: Darling——(*He kisses her.*)

JANET'S *voice rings out gaily from the bedroom.*

JANET: Peter!

LAVINIA (*hopelessly*): Peter!

PETER: Oh, God!

JANET: I can't find my watch—I know I left it by the ed last night.

LAVINIA: Then I wasn't a fool—after all.

JANET: It's all right—I've got it—I shan't be a minute.

PETER (*gently*): Look here, Lavvy——

LAVINIA: I'm not going to be stupid any more—or cry r anything—I really do understand now.

PETER: Lavvy——

LAVINIA: Good-bye, Peter. (*She goes towards the door.*)

PETER: Lavvy—Lavvy—please——(*He catches her arm.*)

LAVINIA: Let me go.

PETER (*holding her*): Janet, Janet—come at once—help me.

LAVINIA (*struggling*): Let me go—I won't see her—I won't——

PETER: Janet—Janet——

JANET *comes in hurriedly—she is dressed and has a hat in her hand.*

JANET: What on earth is the matter—(*She sees* LAVINIA) —Oh!

PETER: She's going again, Janet—she mustn't—I can't bear it.

LAVINIA: Let me go—let me go.

PETER: Janet!

JANET *grabs* LAVINIA'S *other arm.*

LAVINIA (*fighting to control her tears*): How dare you—leave go of me—how dare you.

JANET (*firmly*): Sit down.

LAVINIA: I won't sit down.

JANET: You've got to listen—you've got to let us explain——

LAVINIA: Peter—you're hurting my arm.

PETER: I can't help it—I won't let go until you promise to stay.

LAVINIA: I can't stay—can't you see—it's impossible—it's cruel of you not to let me go—cruel——

She bursts into tears—PETER *and* JANET *let go of her and she sinks into a chair.*

JANET: Please, Miss Hardy—Lavinia—don't cry——
LAVINIA: Don't speak to me.
PETER: Lavvy——
LAVINIA: Leave me alone——
JANET: Peter—I'm going——
PETER: No, no—you're my only chance—I shall never be able to convince her alone.
LAVINIA: Convince me—that's funny. (*She cries again.*)
JANET: It isn't funny—it's terribly serious—here, top crying. (*She hands her a handkerchief.*)
LAVINIA: I've got a handkerchief of my own, thank you.
JANET (*sternly*): Well, use it. (LAVINIA *does so.*) Now, hen——
LAVINIA (*controlling herself*): What's the use of talking —everything is over between Peter and me. I don't want im any more—I'm not fighting for him—you can have im without any struggle—he's yours by rights now anyow.
JANET: He's nothing of the sort—Listen—Peter and I re friends—friends *only*—Do you understand——
LAVINIA: No—I don't—what are you doing here in his at with your watch by his bed?
JANET: I slept here last night.
LAVINIA (*about to cry again*): Oh, Peter—Peter——
PETER: Lavvy—you're so wrong.
JANET: Stop it—Pull yourself together—Peter slept t the Penrose Hotel—I left my husband last night beause he did exactly what you're doing—he took it for ranted that Peter and I were lovers because we were haring a sleeping-car. Then he started forgiving me for it,

so I came here to Peter—and Peter was furious at you for being so childish and horrible to him, so we decided we'd teach the whole lot of you a lesson—you ought to be absolutely ashamed of yourself—not for this morning, that's understandable, but for yesterday and your lack of trust—Peter is definitely not the sort of man who would be engaged to one woman and carry on an affair with another at the same time—and I am not the sort of woman to conduct squalid intrigues in railway carriages—and you ought to know it just by looking at us—so there.

LAVINIA: But—it's all very fine to——

JANET: It isn't all very fine—it's all very unpleasant, and if you and my husband and my relations weren't so nasty-minded, none of this would have happened at all—I should have thought that you particularly, being young and intelligent, would have a clearer sense of values than the others.

LAVINIA: How do you know I am intelligent?

JANET: You must be, underneath all this, because Peter wouldn't tolerate a fool.

LAVINIA: You're very high-handed.

JANET: Do you believe me or do you not?

LAVINIA: Peter!

JANET: Answer me—don't look at Peter—do you?

LAVINIA: I don't know.

JANET: Well, please make up your mind.

LAVINIA: How can you expect me to believe you—all in a minute?

JANET: Because your instincts ought to tell you that
m speaking the truth.

PETER: It *is* the truth, you know, Lavvy.

LAVINIA: You don't love Peter at all?

JANET: Of course I do—I adore him and I always shall
-but I'm not in love with him—I couldn't be—I know
im too well.

LAVINIA: But——

JANET: I've never had the faintest twinge for him—
e doesn't attract me.

LAVINIA: Why not?

JANET: How can I tell why not—some people don't like
ysters.

PETER: I'm not an oyster, Janet.

JANET: I didn't say you were. Lavinia—once more—
o you believe me?

LAVINIA: I suppose so.

JANET: Take her away, Peter.

PETER: But, Janet——

JANET: Take her away—I don't want to see either of
ou again until you're safely married.

LAVINIA (*rising*): I'm sorry, Mrs. Ebony.

JANET: All right——

PETER: I can't leave you like this, Janet.

JANET: You're not leaving me like anything. I'm going
ack to Paul and he can go on forgiving me until he's black
the face.

PETER: Lavvy——

LAVINIA: Oh, Peter——

He takes her in his arms.

JANET: Let me warn you, Peter—there will be recurrences of suspicion all through the day—you'd better get hold of your hotel bill.

PETER: No, there won't, Janet—Lavvy understands now, don't you?

LAVINIA (*meekly*): Yes.

JANET: Away with you both—I'm going to pack my suit-case.

LAVINIA (*going to her*): Good-bye—Janet.

JANET (*kissing her—brusquely*): Good-bye, dear.

PETER *and* LAVINIA *go out.* JANET *sees them to the door and waves them away gaily; then she comes back into the room looking rather miserable. She puts on her hat, lights a cigarette, and sits down thoughtfully at the table. Then suddenly her eyes fill with tears, she pitches her cigarette into the fireplace and buries her head in her arms. The door opens and* ALEC STONE *enters. He gives a little cough.* JANET *starts and looks up.*

JANET: Oh!

ALEC: The front door was open, so I came in.

JANET: Yes, I see you did.

ALEC: Anything wrong?

JANET: No—not exactly.

ALEC: I met Peter and Lavinia on the stairs—they seemed very happy.

JANET: They are.

ALEC: Good. I gather the performance is over.

JANET: Peter and me?

ALEC: Yes.

JANET: Yes, quite over—Would you pass me my handerchief?

ALEC: Certainly. (*He does so.*)

JANET: Thanks. (*She dabs her eyes.*)

ALEC: I'm afraid we shall have to lunch alone—it is ery tiresome.

JANET: Why did you come back?

ALEC: I was passing and I thought I'd pick you and eter up instead of meeting you at the club.

JANET: I see.

ALEC: And I'm very glad I did.

JANET: Are you?

ALEC: I'm awfully good at comforting people.

JANET: I don't need comforting, thank you.

ALEC: You mustn't be ungracious.

JANET: Well, I don't.

ALEC: Why were you crying—when I came in?

JANET: Really, Mr. Stone——

ALEC: Major Stone.

JANET: Major then.

ALEC: Won't you tell me what's upsetting you?

JANET: Just a feeling of anti-climax, that's all.

ALEC: Very depressing.

JANET: Horribly.

ALEC: Perhaps you would rather lunch at a gayer lace than the Guards' Club.

JANET: I don't think I want to lunch at all.

ALEC: You must eat—even if you are going back to our husband.

JANET: How did you know I was?

ALEC: Because you were crying.

JANET: I told you why I was crying—it's because everything seems so—so unsatisfactory.

ALEC: Never mind.

JANET: I do mind—bitterly.

ALEC: That's a very pretty hat.

JANET: It ought to be—it was extremely expensive.

ALEC: Come on—let's go and lunch and talk——

JANET: What can we talk about?

ALEC: You.

JANET: That would be rather nice.

ALEC (*taking her hand*): Dear—Janet——

JANET: Really, Captain Stone!

ALEC: Major——

They go out together.

CURTAIN

ACT III

A fortnight has elapsed since Act II. The scene is the same as Act I. It is late afternoon.

PALLETT *ushers in* MAVIS WITTERSHAM.

PALLETT: Mr. Ebony is not in yet, ma'am.

MAVIS: Thank you—I'll wait a little.

PALLETT: Would you like some tea?

MAVIS: No, thank you.

PALLETT: Very good, ma'am.

She goes out.

MAVIS *goes over to the window thoughtfully, pulling off her gloves. As she does so, the telephone rings.* MAVIS *goes to it.*

MAVIS (*at telephone*): Hallo—No—he isn't in yet—it's Mavis Wittersham speaking—Oh, Miss Hardy—I never recognised your voice—Yes—Paul had a wire from her this morning—from Paris—yes—to-day—very well, I'll tell him—Good-bye.

She hangs up, and the pleasant social smile with which she has been fascinating the telephone fades into an expression of sullen rage. PAUL *enters. He looks slightly embarrassed.*

PAUL: Mavis——

MAVIS: Paulo—I've been here for hours.

PAUL: I'm terribly sorry, my dear—I was stuck in the traffic.

MAVIS: Lavinia Hardy just telephoned.

PAUL: Lavinia Hardy?

MAVIS: Yes, she wanted to know if you'd heard from Janet.

PAUL: Did you tell her?

MAVIS: Yes—I said she was coming back to-day.

PAUL: What did she say?

MAVIS: She said, 'Oh!'

PAUL: Poor girl.

MAVIS: Do you think Peter's coming back, too?

PAUL: Young swine.

MAVIS: Poor Lavinia Hardy—my heart aches for her.

PAUL: She's young, though—she'll get over it.

MAVIS: Why is Janet coming back?

PAUL: I don't know

MAVIS: You won't let her alter things, will you?

PAUL (*turning away*): No one could.

MAVIS: We should be so grateful to her really.

PAUL: Mavis—— (*He takes her hands.*)

MAVIS: If it hadn't been for her—we might never have known.

PAUL: Beloved—— (*He takes her in his arms.*)

MAVIS (*breaking away*): I feel so happy and bewildered and frightened.

PAUL: Why frightened?

MAVIS: Suppose something goes wrong and you can't divorce her after all?

PAUL: Nothing can go wrong.

MAVIS: When Jim died I thought I should never love

nybody again—and yet you were there all the time—and never knew.

PAUL (*advancing towards her again*): Darling.

MAVIS: No, no—we must be decent—this is her house eally.

PAUL: Has *she* been decent?

MAVIS: That doesn't matter—other people don't see ife as we do.

PAUL: I told her I'd stand by her whatever she'd done—forgave her completely, and on top of that she lost her emper and abused me.

MAVIS: Poor Janet—she has no code, you see.

PAUL: And then the next day when mother plucked p her courage and went to see her—for my sake——

MAVIS: I know.

PAUL: Janet—insulted her.

MAVIS (*with relish*): Mrs. Chilham insulted her, too.

PAUL: I suppose it was only natural that she should efend Janet.

MAVIS: Justice is more important than blood-ties—he was wrong to defend her.

PAUL: I'm not really angry with Mrs. Chilham—I nderstand.

MAVIS (*fondly*): Of course you do.

PAUL: I'm hating to-day, Mavis.

MAVIS: Courage, Paulo.

PALLETT *enters.*

PALLETT (*announcing*): Mrs. Chilham.

MRS. CHILHAM *enters brightly.*

MRS. C. (*advancing*): Paul.

PAUL (*kissing her coldly*): My dear.

MRS. C.: How do you do, Mrs. Wittersham—you're looking so well—what has happened to you?

MAVIS (*frigidly*): I'm always well, thank you.

MRS. C.: How very fortunate. (*She sits down.*)

PAUL: Would you like some tea?

MRS. C.: No, thank you.

PAUL: Have you heard from Janet?

MRS. C.: Yes—she telephoned me this morning from Paris—she's crossing to-day—that's why I'm here.

PAUL: I see.

MAVIS: Is Peter Chelsworth returning with her?

MRS. C.: Peter Chelsworth—Oh, dear, no—he's not in Paris.

PAUL: Not in Paris?

MRS. C.: Oh, no.

MAVIS: Really, Mrs. Chilham.

MRS. C.: Really what, Mrs. Wittersham?

PAUL: Well, my dear—we're not quite as silly as all that, you know.

MRS. C.: You mean you think Peter is with Janet?

PAUL: Of course.

MRS. C.: Well, he isn't—I saw him in the park yesterday morning.

PAUL: What!

MRS. C.: Riding—such a pretty horse with a great big white spot over one eye.

MAVIS (*with a contemptuous smile*): Are you quite *sure* you weren't mistaken?

MRS. C.: Quite. I admit I'm some years older than you,

Mrs. Wittersham—but I'm still in possession of my faculties.

PAUL: But, my dear—people pass so quickly in the ow—you might——

MRS. C.: Peter got off and talked to me—he told me uch a lovely secret.

PAUL: Secret?

MAVIS: About Janet.

MRS. C.: Oh, no—nothing about Janet.

MAVIS: Had he heard from her?

MRS. C.: Yes, Mrs. Wittersham—if you must know—e had heard from her—she sent him a postcard of the Arc de Triomphe.

MAVIS: Is Janet alone in Paris?

MRS. C.: Really, Mrs. Wittersham—I cannot see that f my daughter were entirely surrounded by Chinamen, t should concern you.

MAVIS: Nor surprise me.

PAUL: Mavis—please.

MAVIS (*with heat*): All Paul's friends are naturally in-erested in Janet's rather reprehensible behaviour.

MRS. C.: I quite see why.

MAVIS (*furiously*): Oh!

PALLETT *enters.*

PALLETT (*announcing*): Mrs. Ebony.

MRS. EBONY *enters—she kisses* PAUL, *shakes hands with* MAVIS, *and bows austerely to* MRS. CHILHAM.

PAUL: Mother—when did you arrive?

MRS. E.: Just now—I motored up directly after you elephoned this morning.

PAUL: Mother, dear—it wasn't a bit necessary.

MRS. E.: I prefer to be here when Janet returns.

MAVIS: I think it was splendid of you, Mrs. Ebony.

MRS. E.: Thank you, my dear.

MRS. C.: You look hot, Agnes.

MRS. E.: I'm quite cool, thank you, Violet.

MRS. C.: I'm so glad.

PAUL: Tea?

MRS. E.: No, thank you.

There is a slight pause.

MRS. C.: It ought to be very smooth to-day.

MRS. E.: What?

MRS. C.: The channel, of course.

PAUL: Look here, mother, I think it would really be better if you went home and let me telephone you when Janet arrives.

MRS. C.: Much better.

MRS. E.: No, Paul—I shall stay here.

PAUL: Very well.

MAVIS: Shall I go, Paul?

PAUL: No, Mavis—I should like you to stay.

MRS. E.: You're looking extremely well, Mavis—what have you been doing?

MAVIS: Nothing out of the ordinary.

MRS. C.: How very restrained of you.

MAVIS: I don't understand you, Mrs. Chilham.

MRS. C.: Then I must be right—mustn't I?

MRS. E.: I'm very sorry for you, Violet.

MRS. C.: Why should you be?

MRS. E.: You must be feeling very uncomfortable inside.

MRS. C.: My digestion has always been superb.

MRS. E.: You know quite well I didn't mean that.

MRS. C.: You're so very sudden, Agnes—it's difficult to know what you do mean.

MRS. E.: Fortunately—after Paul and Janet's divorce you will no longer have to try.

MRS. C.: Divorce!

MRS. E.: You are divorcing Janet, are you not, Paul?

PAUL: Well—I——

MRS. C.: I never heard such nonsense.

MAVIS: It shouldn't be very difficult.

MRS. C.: Don't be too sure, Mrs. Wittersham.

MRS. E.: Paul—are you or are you not?

PAUL: Really, mother—that concerns Janet and me.

MRS. E.: You'll be a fool if you don't.

PALLETT *enters.*

PALLETT (*announcing*): Mr. and Mrs. Chelsworth.

PETER *and* LAVINIA *enter—they are both looking very happy and contented.*

LAVINIA (*shaking hands with* PAUL): How do you do——

PAUL (*flabbergasted*): I—I—er—don't understand.

PETER (*also shaking hands*): Lavinia and I were married this morning.

LAVINIA: At a Registry Office.

MAVIS (*advancing*): I'm so glad—congratulations.

LAVINIA: Thank you.

PETER: How are you, Mrs. Chilham? (*He shakes hands.*)

MRS. C.: Dear things—I didn't give you away—— (*To* PAUL.) That was the secret. Peter told me yesterday.

MRS. E.: But—but——

PETER (*firmly*): How do you do.

LAVINIA: We came to see Janet.

PETER: No, we didn't, Lavinia—we came to see Paul.

LAVINIA: But, Peter—we can't say what we were going to say—now——

PETER: Oh, yes, we can—it's a good thing you're here, Mrs. Ebony—and Mrs. Chilham and Mrs. Wittersham.

MRS. E.: I am quite at a loss, Mr. Chelsworth—I understood you were in Paris.

PETER: Yes, I know you did.

PAUL: Mother, please——

MRS. C.: My dears—I hope you'll be tremendously happy.

LAVINIA: I'm sure we shall.

PETER: We've come really, Paul, to put your mind at rest about Janet.

MAVIS (*before she can stop herself*): Oh!

PAUL: What about Janet?

PETER: If you're still suspecting Janet of immorality, you're as wrong as you were at first.

MRS. E.: Wrong, indeed!

LAVINIA (*brightly*): Yes, quite wrong.

MRS. E.: You forget that I unfortunately overheard your husband making love to my daughter-in-law in his own bedroom.

LAVINIA: Yes, I know. (*Quoting.*) 'Your arms are so strong—wind them round me—it is as though we were alone on a desert island—you and me.'

PETER (*correcting her*): You and I.

LAVINIA: Sorry.

MRS. E.: Well, really——

PETER: That was a put-up job—we knew you were here.

MRS. E.: Not very convincing in a Divorce Court.

PETER: We have ample proof of our innocence—my valet is a very truthful man—and here is my receipted bill from the Penrose Hotel.

He produces it and hands it to PAUL.

MRS. C. (*delighted*): There now—I knew it.

PAUL: Peter—what does it all mean?

PETER: It means that Janet was so furious that you should all have suspected her and me of being lovers and that on top of it all Paul should have forgiven her, that she determined to give you all something to be forgiving about.

LAVINIA: But being a darling she couldn't carry it through—it was my fault. I was as bad as you were—but I didn't know Janet then, and I do now. She stayed with me until she went to Paris last week.

MAVIS: Stayed with you?

LAVINIA: Yes.

MRS. E.: Did she go to Paris alone?

PETER: Of course.

LAVINIA: She's staying with Valerie Marshall.

PAUL: Peter—is this true?

PETER: Absolutely.

PAUL: The whole thing?

LAVINIA: You don't suppose I should have married Peter if it wasn't, do you?

PAUL (*sinking down*): My God!

PETER: We thought it only fair to Janet to let you all

know before she arrived. She might get desperate if you started suspecting her again.

MAVIS: Paul—Paul——

MRS. C. (*sharply*): What's the matter, Mrs. Wittersham?

MAVIS (*turning away*): Nothing.

LAVINIA: I think we'd better go now, Peter.

PETER: Yes—I think we had.

MRS. E.: Who is this Valerie Marshall?

PETER: A very old friend of Janet's—isn't she, Paul?

PAUL: Yes—I know Valerie well.

MRS. C. (*rising and kissing* PETER *and* LAVINIA): I'm so very, very grateful to you both for being so considerate and kind.

PAUL: I'm grateful to you, too.

MAVIS: Paul! (*She bursts into tears.*)

MRS. E.: Mavis!

MRS. C.: Why are you crying, Mrs. Wittersham?

MAVIS: I feel so ashamed of the way we've all treated poor Janet.

MRS. C.: You mustn't upset yourself—that can all be put right.

MAVIS: Yes, I know it can.

MRS. C.: I hope you observe, Agnes, that I was right from the first.

MRS. E.: Rubbish—you suspected Janet as much as anybody.

MRS. C.: My own daughter?—Never!

PETER: Well, we really must go now—we've got to pack.

LAVINIA: We're going to Italy to-morrow—for our honeymoon.

PAUL (*shaking* PETER'S *hand heavily*): You've been very decent, Peter—please forgive me for thinking you a cad.

PETER: Did you think me a cad?—That never struck me.

PAUL: Anyhow you've proved conclusively that you're not.

PETER: I forgive you like anything, Paul—don't you, Lavvy?

LAVINIA: Yes, I do, wholeheartedly. I forgive everybody—Good-bye.

MRS. C.: Good-bye, dear.

MRS. E.: Good-bye.

PETER: Tell Janet to telephone us the moment she gets back.

PAUL: All right—good-bye.

PETER: Good-bye.

They go out. There is rather an awkward silence.

MRS. E.: Well——

PAUL: Peter's a good sort.

MAVIS: I hate him.

PAUL: Mavis, that's not like you.

MAVIS: I can't help it—I do.

MRS. C.: You seem so upset over Janet's innocence—would you like some smelling salts? I have some in my bag.

MAVIS: No, thank you.

MRS. E.: I see the whole thing quite clearly now, of course.

MRS. C.: Do you, Agnes?

Mrs. E.: Yes, when I come to think of it, Mr. Chelsworth was fully dressed when he rushed out of the bedroom.

Paul: Really, mother.

Mrs. E.: I'm afraid I've been very unjust.

Paul (*gloomily*): We all have.

Mrs. C.: We must do what we can to make it up to the poor darling.

Mrs. E.: Yes—we must.

Mavis: Paul.

Paul: Yes?

Mavis: I don't think I'll stay.

Mrs. C.: Why not, Mrs. Wittersham?

Mavis: I feel terribly tired—I think there must be thunder in the air.

Paul: I wish you would stay, Mavis.

Mavis: But, Paul——

Paul: Just a little longer—until Janet arrives—I feel we all ought to be here, having wronged her so terribly—last time.

Mavis: I fail to see why you're all so easily convinced.

Paul: Mavis!

Mavis: Well, I don't—and I'm not convinced at all.

Mrs. C.: Poor Mrs. Wittersham.

Paul: Mavis, how can you!

Mavis: I think Janet is a liar and always has been.

Paul: Mavis, stop.

Mrs. C.: How dare you!

Mavis: And you can all swarm over her and apologise to her if you like, but I'm not. I'm going.

There is a loud knocking at the front door.

MRS. C.: You're too late now, my dear.

MRS. E. (*smiling amiably*): You can always tell Janet by her knock.

PAUL (*reproachfully*): Mavis.

MAVIS: I'm sorry, Paul—I didn't mean to burst out like that.

PAUL: I understand.

MAVIS: Forgive me, won't you?

PAUL: You know I do.

MRS. C.: There must be thunder in the air—I feel a little sick.

JANET *flings open the door and walks in. Her manner suggests defiance to an alarming extent.*

PAUL (*advancing*): Janet!

JANET (*avoiding embracing him*): Hallo, Paul.

MRS. C.: Welcome home, darling.

JANET: Thank you, mother.

MRS. E.: Janet—— (*She rises and kisses her swiftly.*)

JANET (*astonished*): Good heavens!

MRS. E.: I welcome you, too, my dear.

MAVIS (*with an effort*): So do I.

JANET: Mavis—what a surprise—How well you look!

PAUL: Janet, my dear—would you like some tea?

JANET: No, thank you—I had some on the train.

MRS. E.: Did you have a good crossing?

JANET: Beautiful—like glass.

MRS. C.: I'm so glad.

JANET: What on earth is the matter with you all?

PAUL: Nothing is the matter, Janet.

JANET: Do you realise where I've been?

MRS. E.: Yes, dear, Paris.

JANET: I have not been in Paris alone.

MRS. E.: Why should you be?

MRS. C.: Paris is very depressing when you're alone.

PAUL: Peter and Lavinia have been here.

JANET: Oh!

MRS. C.: They were married to-day.

JANET: I knew they were going to be.

PAUL: From what they told us, we realise that we all owe you an apology.

JANET: Apology?

MRS. E.: Yes, Janet—let me be the first to say it—I'm sorry.

JANET: What for?

MRS. E.: For suspecting you and Peter Chelsworth of immorality.

JANET: Oh—now I'm beginning to understand.

PAUL: Please be generous.

MAVIS (*heroically*): I'm sorry too, Janet!

JANET: Thank you, dear.

PAUL: Good old Mavis.

MRS. C.: Oh, Janet darling—I am so terribly glad you're back.

JANET: This is all very difficult.

PAUL: Difficult?

JANET: Yes—exceedingly—you see I intend to be honest with you, and that's always rather upsetting.

MRS. C.: Dear Janet.

JANET: Do stop cooing, mother—you're going on like an amorous old dove.

MRS. C.: Not amorous, darling.

JANET: As I said before, Paul—I have not been in Paris alone.

PAUL: We know, Janet.

JANET: You know!

MRS. E.: Yes, my dear, we know everything now.

JANET: Then you know that I'm in love—I think for the first time in my life—with all respect to you, Paul—and I'm very, very happy.

MRS. C. (*fondly*): Janet.

MRS. E.: Now, now, now, Janet—surely all this isn't necessary—we've apologised to you as humbly as we can.

PAUL: Let us off lightly, old thing.

JANET: His name is Alec Stone—I adore him.

MRS. C.: It's a lovely name, darling—it sounds so strong.

JANET: Mother, don't be infuriating.

MRS. E.: I feel as if an enormous weight had been lifted from my mind.

JANET: And he loves me—amazingly.

MRS. C.: How is Valerie Marshall?

JANET: Valerie? Very well—Why?

MRS. E. (*smiling*): There you are, my dear.

JANET (*understanding*): Oh, I see—Peter told you I was staying with Valerie.

MRS. C.: Yes, dear.

JANET: Well, I'm sorry—but I wasn't.

MRS. C.: Oh, Janet, Janet, don't be so ridiculous.

MRS. E.: Silly child—— (*She rises.*) I think we'd better go now, Violet, and leave Paul and Janet together.

JANET: I stayed at the Crillon——

MRS. C.: That's the one overlooking the Place de la Concorde, isn't it?

JANET: Yes.

MRS. C.: Poor Marie Antoinette—Good-bye, darling. (*She kisses her.*)

MAVIS: I'm going, too.

PAUL: No—Mavis—please stay.

MRS. E. (*kissing* JANET): Come and lunch to-morrow, dear, if you can.

JANET: I'm afraid I can't—I'm lunching with Alec.

MRS. E.: Bring him, too, dear. Come, Violet.

She and MRS. CHILHAM *go out, smiling delightedly.*

JANET: Well, really!

PAUL: Mother means well, you know, Janet.

JANET: Terribly well. I feel as if I'd been swimming in treacle.

She takes off her hat and arranges her hair before the mirror.

PAUL: You mustn't be bitter, old thing.

JANET: I couldn't be bitter, Paul—in the face of so much understanding it would be sacrilege.

PAUL: I've been an awful fool, Janet.

JANET: Paul! This is so sudden!

PAUL: To have suspected you and Peter was unforgivably stupid—I must have been mad.

JANET: Not mad, dear—just prematurely optimistic.

PAUL: What do you mean?

JANET: You wanted me to be unfaithful to you so much hat you grabbed the first opportunity of believing it.

MAVIS: Janet, how can you!

JANET: Don't look at me with those big reproachful yes, Mavis—it breaks my heart.

PAUL: What is the matter with you, Janet?

JANET: I'm enjoying myself.

MAVIS: At our expense

JANET: I've enjoyed myself at your expense for years, Mavis—this is something far more exhilarating.

PAUL: Peter has behaved like a gentleman.

JANET: How disgusting of him—I must speak to him eriously.

PAUL: Janet, please——

JANET: What!

PAUL: I've got a confession to make to you, Janet.

JANET: Confession?

MAVIS: Paul——

PAUL: It's only fair, Mavis—one must be honest.

MAVIS: Let me go, then.

PAUL: Very well—if you really wish it. (*Turns away adly.*)

MAVIS: I'll stay.

PAUL: Thank you, Mavis.

JANET: Perhaps you'd both like me to go upstairs.

PAUL: Don't make it hard for us, Janet.

JANET: What is the matter?

PAUL: Mavis and I love each other.

JANET (*unmoved*): Do you?

PAUL: When you left me two weeks ago, I believed things of you of which I am now dreadfully ashamed—so did Mavis—didn't you, Mavis?

MAVIS: Yes.

PAUL: And in the interim—since you've been away—we made this—this discovery.

JANET: You poor dears.

MAVIS: Why do you say that?

JANET: Because it must have been so awfully surprising for you.

PAUL: I was filled with resentment against you, Janet—I intended to divorce you, naming Peter as co-respondent——

JANET: Quite.

PAUL: I'm throwing myself on your mercy.

JANET: So you were going to divorce me, were you?

PAUL: Yes—but now I'm going to ask you a great favour.

JANET: All right, what is it?

PAUL: Will you divorce me? I'll make it perfectly easy.

JANET: Do you agree to this, Mavis?

PAUL (*quickly*): Mavis need not be implicated—I'll go away with somebody, somewhere—the case will be undefended.

JANET: Collusion?

PAUL: Yes—I suppose so.

JANET: I don't think I could lend my support to anything underhand.

PAUL: Janet!

JANET: It might be found out.

PAUL: Not if it were arranged carefully.

JANET (*thoughtfully*): It's very, very perplexing.

MAVIS: Janet——

JANET: Don't speak to me, Mavis—I'm trying to control myself and behave rationally and sensibly. You see his situation is so terribly, terribly unexpected—it's struck me all of a heap as you might say.

PAUL (*shamefaced*): I know—it's damnable for you.

JANET: I'm trying to be brave—but it's difficult.

PAUL: Life is difficult.

JANET: I beg your pardon?

PAUL: I said life *is* difficult.

JANET: You must put that in your next novel, Paul—waste not, want not.

MAVIS: You are insupportable, Janet.

JANET: Mavis, dear, you've compromised yourself too thoroughly to be able to lose your temper with advantage.

MAVIS: I'm not going to stay here and be made a butt for your flippancy.

JANET: I think you'd better stay. Paul and I might have a *rapprochement* the moment your back was turned, and then where would you be?

MAVIS: I hate you.

JANET: But only because I'm still married to Paul—when you've got him your hatred will turn to envy.

PAUL: I've never known you like this, Janet.

JANET: You've never known me at all, dear.

MAVIS: Nothing can be achieved by this bickering.

JANET: I quite agree—what is to be done?

PAUL: Things like this just happen—it's nobody's fault really.

JANET: Nonsense—it's everybody's fault.

PAUL: Well, I can only say I'm sorry, and I'm counting on your generosity—not only to agree to divorcing me, but to forgive me——

JANET: Forgive you?

PAUL: Yes.

JANET (*laughing*): Oh, Paul.

PAUL: Don't laugh.

JANET: I always laugh at the wrong moment—it's one of my worst failings.

PAUL: There's nothing to laugh at now.

JANET (*hysterically*): Oh, yes, there is.

PAUL: Look here, Janet——

JANET: Don't worry, my dear—I forgive you completely.

PAUL: Janet!

JANET (*still laughing*): And you, Mavis—I forgive you for everything.

MAVIS: Everything!

JANET: Yes, dear—absolutely. (*She kisses her firmly.*)

PAUL: You are a brick, Janet.

JANET: There is only one condition, Paul—you must both go away—I couldn't bear you to be in the house—it would upset me.

PAUL: I understand.

JANET: You'll have to be very careful and not see much of each other until the divorce is over.

PAUL: Of course.

JANET: But afterwards—we'll be friends—won't we?

PAUL: Always—eternally.

JANET: You must both come and dine—I'll give a party or you.

PAUL: Oh, Janet!

JANET: Now will you both go, please—I feel a little remulous—you'd better stay at the Penrose Hotel, Paul—Peter says it's awfully comfortable—you can send or your things in the morning.

PAUL: Very well—Good-bye, Janet.

JANET (*shaking hands*): Good-bye.

MAVIS: Good-bye, Janet.

JANET (*shaking hands*): Good-bye!—you know your way down, don't you?

MAVIS: Yes, thank you.

JANET (*ushering them out*): And remember that not nly do I understand, but I forgive you—now and always.

They go out. JANET *returns into the room. The telephone rings loudly,* JANET *goes to it.*

JANET (*at telephone*): Hallo—yes, darling—yes, darling —yes, darling——

CURTAIN

THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR

TO
G. B. STERN
WITHOUT WHOM.

'THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOUR' was produced in ondon by Basil Dean at the St. Martin's Theatre on ugust 24, 1926.

The characters are named in the order of their appearance.

NADYA	MADGE TITHERADGE
SABIEN	FRANCIS LISTER
ZANA	FREDA GODFREY
GENERAL KRISH	C. M. HALLARD
MISS PHIPPS	ADA KING
COURT USHER	ROEBUCK DISNEY
PRINCE KERI OF ZALGAR	HERBERT MARSHALL
THE GRAND DUCHESS EMILIE OF ZALGAR	LADY TREE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

NADYA
ZANA, *her Maid*
MISS PHIPPS, *her Secretary*
THE GRAND DUCHESS EMILIE OF ZALGAR
PRINCE KERI OF ZALGAR
GENERAL KRISH
SABIEN PASTAL

ACT I, SCENE I—NADYA'S *flat in Paris.*
SCENE II—*The same a few hours later.*
ACT II, SCENE—NADYA'S *private apartments in the Royal Palace of Krayia. A year later.*
ACT III, SCENE I—*The same as Act II.*
SCENE II—*The same, a few hours later.*

ACT I

Scene I

l small but expensively furnished flat in Paris. When curtain rises the stage is empty. It is about five o'clock a.m., and the coming dawn is already creeping through the shutters. There comes the sound of voices and the outer door opening. Nadya *and* Sabien *come in—they both appear to be a little bit draggled.* Nadya *is extremely beautiful, her frock is exquisite but slightly exaggerated.* Sabien *is in full evening dress; his tie is crumpled and his hair very ruffled.*

Nadya *switches on the lights and flings off her cloak.*

Nadya: What a party! I'm nearly dead——(*She yawns.*)

Sabien: Don't have these beastly electric lights—it's awn outside—let's pull up the blinds and watch it.

Nadya: Wait till I've powdered my nose. (*She powders er nose and reddens her lips.*)

Sabien *pulls up the blinds and opens the windows and shutters.*

Sabien: There—that's better.

Nadya (*blinking*): Oh! it's divine, isn't it? And *how* unecoming!

Sabien (*laughing a trifle stupidly*): Artificial—exotic—rchid, that's what you are—artificial—exotic——

NADYA: Do you know, Sabien, I believe you're a little bit 'tight' still!

SABIEN: Don't be silly, dear.

NADYA (*giggling*): I'm not silly—but you *are*——

SABIEN: I'm damned tired—I know that all right.

NADYA (*still giggling*): I know what made me laugh more than anything else to-night—poor old Julie's dress—it looked as though she'd been to bed in it constantly for the last year.

SABIEN (*giggling too*): Agony—that's all—sheer agony!

NADYA: And oh, my God! when she sang 'Toi que J'Aime' all over Maurice Normand——

She lolls backwards and forwards, helpless between laughter, a little too much champagne, and extreme weariness. NADYA *goes to window.*

SABIEN: Agony—that's all—sheer agony!

NADYA (*at the window*): Paris is so fresh and clean in the early morning, isn't it?

SABIEN: Frightfully. (*He joins her at the window.*)

NADYA: Virginal.

SABIEN: Don't be silly, dear.

NADYA: But it is. You don't understand.

SABIEN: You have such lovely thoughts, darling.

NADYA: You always laugh at my mania for Paris. It's horrid of you.

SABIEN: I love it, too, really. After all, I met you here.

NADYA: Thank you, dear. That's better.

SABIEN: Oh, God!

NADYA: What's the matter?

SABIEN: Nothing. Happiness takes one's breath away metimes, doesn't it?

NADYA: Look at the market carts.

SABIEN: I often try for hours to separate my passion for u from my love for you—it's terribly difficult.

NADYA: Those darling horses—they look so bored.

SABIEN: Because love lasts and passion doesn't.

NADYA: I do hope the Empress Eugénie liked the ffel Tower as much as I do.

SABIEN: You know it doesn't.

NADYA: What doesn't what?

SABIEN: Don't be tiresome, Nadya. I said passion esn't last, and you went meandering on about the mpress Eugénie.

NADYA: Nothing lasts—that's why life is such an ex-emely poor joke.

SABIEN: Don't say things like that.

NADYA: Why not?

SABIEN: I can't bear it.

NADYA: You shouldn't start talking about what will st and what won't—it's waste of time—precious time.

SABIEN: We've got æons of time.

NADYA: Have we?

SABIEN: If you don't tire of me.

NADYA: Idiot.

SABIEN: I mean it. You might, you know. You're very mperamental.

NADYA: Shut up, darling.

SABIEN: You insulted Elsie to-night.

NADYA: Well, she annoyed me.

SABIEN: Darling. Darling. Darling.

NADYA: She's got sweetbreads instead of brains.

SABIEN: You're so didactic and imperious.

NADYA (*turning away*): Shut up, Sabien.

SABIEN: Why—angel—what's the matter?

NADYA: Shall I go and make some coffee?

SABIEN: Yes, do. I'll help.

NADYA: No, you won't—you make such a row over everything, you stay here—admiring the sunrise. I shan't be a minute. (*She rises.*)

SABIEN (*also rising and leaning against the window*): Wouldn't it be awful if I hurled myself out of the window?

NADYA: Yes, awful, and very stupid. (*She takes up her cloak and goes out.*)

SABIEN (*thinking she is still there*): I should never have the courage to commit suicide, whatever happened. I wonder what it feels like exactly—the actual moment when everything stops! I don't suppose it feels like anything at all—but still—— (*He turns round.*) Oh, I thought you were there!

Re-enter NADYA.

NADYA: What, dear?

SABIEN: I thought you were still in the room. I've been talking for hours—all about suicide.

NADYA: What fun!

SABIEN (*pensively*): It's awfully interesting, you know—wondering whether there's going to be an after life! And if so, what it will be like.

NADYA: I haven't finished wondering what this life's going to be like yet—without looking further ahead.

SABIEN: You never look ahead at all—live for a day—
st like a butterfly—a careless——
NADYA: Do stop comparing me to things—I'm not a bit
e an orchid, or a butterfly——
SABIEN: Don't snap at me. What an evil temper you've
t——
NADYA (*smiling*): I don't look ahead, mainly because
n so happy and content with now!
SABIEN: Angel! (*He yawns.*) Ugh! I'm so sleepy.
NADYA: Sit down, darling, and don't go on mumbling—
u'll only wake Zana. I'm going to put the coffee on the
ing now.
SABIEN: What thing?
NADYA: The gas thing, of course.

She goes out. SABIEN *takes a cigarette out of a lacquer box, lights it, and sinks on to the couch. He puts his feet up and hums a little tune. Re-enter* NADYA *with a tray on which are two cups and saucers and a sugar-basin.*

na anticipated us; she had it all prepared, except for the
ating.
SABIEN: Three days more. Isn't it marvellous?
NADYA (*looking down at him*): Yes, it is.
SABIEN: Kiss me.
NADYA: Why should I?
SABIEN: Because you love me.
NADYA: Such a commonplace reason, isn't it? (*She bends
wn and kisses him.*) There!

He holds her down.

, darling—let me go now—don't be so tiresome! (*She
uggles free.*)

SABIEN: Are you looking forward to being married again?

NADYA: Yes, my first experience was such a shrieking success.

SABIEN: I shan't behave like Alex.

NADYA: You couldn't. Nobody could! That thought was always one of my greatest comforts.

SABIEN: I can't imagine how you ever stood it.

NADYA: Well, don't try. It's silly to drag beastly memories of the past into a present—like this!

She strokes his hair with her left hand and helps herself to a cigarette with her right.

SABIEN: It is wonderful. (*Striking a match.*) Here.

NADYA: Thanks, dear.

SABIEN (*complacently leaning back again*): I love you—I love you—I love you.

NADYA: Thanks, dear.

SABIEN: Now you say it.

NADYA (*absently pinning up a bit of straying hair*): I love you—I love you—I love you.

SABIEN: Thanks, dear.

NADYA (*thoughtfully*): And I wonder why——

SABIEN (*laughing*): Because I possess perfect looks, in addition to every manly virtue.

NADYA (*seriously*): I didn't mean that. I meant I wonder why all this happiness should come to me—just now. I haven't deserved it.

SABIEN (*drily*): My dear, you deserve everything in the world for having put up with Alex for those three years.

NADYA: No—but since then—I haven't deserved anything. I've been so silly and shallow and cheap.

SABIEN: Now for Heaven's sake don't start abasing yourself—it's a positive mania with you—especially after parties.

NADYA: Yes, I always feel worse about everything—after parties.

SABIEN: So do most people.

NADYA: . . . And it's not only to *us* that I've been silly and cheap! We have such elastic senses of values. To the world—the real, respectable, decent world—I've been flagrantly immoral.

SABIEN (*smiling*): I love 'flagrantly.'

NADYA: Oh, Sabien, don't laugh at me! You see, I honestly wish I hadn't.

SABIEN: Wish you hadn't what?

NADYA: Lived like I have since Alex died.

SABIEN: Don't say it in that reckless way as though——

NADYA: Well——

SABIEN: I know.

NADYA: It's so strange of you to know, and to be so dear about it.

SABIEN: What is it to me, anyway? Your past! As long as I may have the future.

NADYA: I've read that in a book.

SABIEN: Of course you have. A romance! Oh, Nadya, isn't it amazing that however cynical and disillusioned one may feel oneself to be, the first moment that Love starts there's Romance and Glamour bobbing up again as though they'd never been downed.

NADYA: They never can be downed really—if you have the right sort of mind.

SABIEN (*excitedly*): But real romance, Nadya! I'm filled with it now, and all because of you. I'd like to do wonderful deeds for you——

NADYA: Yes.

SABIEN: Fight for you——!

NADYA: Lovely.

SABIEN: Carry you away on a horse——!

NADYA (*firmly*): No.

SABIEN: All right—horse out!

NADYA (*laughing*): You are absurd——

SABIEN: No—it's horrible of you to damp me—I could work myself up into a frenzy of idealistic heroism over you. I'd die for you——

NADYA: Don't say that—it's so silly, dear.

SABIEN: No, it isn't—it's true!

NADYA (*rising*): Anyhow, the kitchen is probably now entirely flooded with coffee.

She goes out. SABIEN *rolls over on the couch and buries his face in a cushion.* NADYA *comes in again with the coffee-pot.*

I do hope it doesn't taste burnt. (*She pours it out.*)

SABIEN (*talking into the cushion*): Umm—umm—umm——

NADYA: What did you say?

SABIEN (*sitting up*): I said it probably does.

NADYA: Well, drink it and see.

SABIEN (*taking cup*): Drink yours at the same time.

NADYA: Very well—wait a moment. (*She takes her cup from the table.*) Now.

They both drink—and sigh with relief.

It's all right.

SABIEN. Excellent. What are you going to do tomorrow?

NADYA: You mean to-day.

SABIEN: Yes—to-day.

NADYA: I shall sleep until lunch-time—then I shall come and fetch you in the car, and we'll eat a little—just a very little at Laperouse—then a short drive in the Bois, and then I shall have to go and be fitted.

SABIEN: You never stop being fitted.

NADYA: I shall then come back and rest so as to be in the right mood to enjoy 'Louise.' I adore 'Louise.' I shall clutch your arm and cry happily—and look dreadful for the rest of the evening.

SABIEN: And then we shall be one more day nearer.

NADYA: Yes, one more day nearer.

SABIEN: Will you ever want to go back to Krayia again —after we're married?

NADYA: Perhaps—some day. I was unhappy there, but with you I shall be able to face every memory and laugh. And it *is* a beautiful country.

SABIEN: It sounds lovely—from what you've said, here and there. I want to see it.

NADYA: The hills are perfect, and the woods—like English woods in spring, with bluebells and primroses—and the people are fun, too. They wear weird clothes—specially in the little villages—bright colours, and thick

awful shoes. I used to go with Aunt Tania driving, and they'd all cheer and curtsey and throw flowers into the carriage.

SABIEN: She was the Queen, wasn't she?

NADYA: Yes. If only she'd lived a little longer, everything would have been different.

SABIEN: You mean about Alex?

NADYA: Yes. My stepmother would never have been able to have forced the marriage—as she did. I could have appealed against it. Aunt Tania was awfully fond of me. It would all have been so much better. I should have married some nice worthy young man and led a moderately uninteresting social life. With occasional children to vary the monotony. I should never have suffered—and broken away—and been—well—like this!

SABIEN: Oh, but I'm so glad you suffered, and broke away.

NADYA: So am I—now.

SABIEN: I hope you'll never develop into a stickler for etiquette. After all, you're Royal blood! I shall have to obey you always.

NADYA: I've disowned my country—or rather it's disowned me—at least I should think so. I haven't heard any news for so long. Krish writes so seldom.

SABIEN: Krish?

NADYA: I told you all about him. My greatest friend, all through my childhood—all my life, really. Being away for however long doesn't make any difference to that sort of friendship. He's the only one in Krayia who knows the truth about Alex.

SABIEN: And he's always kept in touch with you?

NADYA: Yes, until just lately. I shall probably hear from him again soon.

SABIEN: But didn't anyone else know how Alex treated you?

NADYA: Only his family, and my stepmother, and they pretended not to.

SABIEN: Tell me all about it.

NADYA (*laughing*): You're dreadful, Sabien. I tell you I've put it all behind me—for ever.

SABIEN: Go on, tell me.

NADYA: Have some more coffee?

SABIEN: Tell me all about how awful it was—and how ill-treated you were—and I'll sympathise too beautifully, and kiss you, and lay the ghosts once and for all.

NADYA: I was ill-fated—from the first—everything went wrong.

SABIEN: Splendid—what a good beginning!

NADYA (*grandiloquently*): Fate placed rather a dirty thumb upon the pulse of my career!

SABIEN: Luscious.

NADYA: Bad fairies arrived in motor-bus loads at my christening.

SABIEN: Excellent.

NADYA: And then my wedding! Oh, Sabien, my wedding! How you'd have laughed. There was an enormous fuss made all over the country—general holiday and everything, and a children's battle of flowers, and a torchlight procession in the evening. It had all been arranged—the custom in Krayia. I'd only met Alex three times. My pic-

ture was all over the place, leering up from fancy biscuit boxes and glaring down from hoardings. One fearful one with a squint.

SABIEN: How encouraging!

NADYA: It didn't matter to me—I was beyond that—I'd seen myself in the glass. I don't mind dwelling for hours on the horrid tragedies of my life—but don't—don't ask me to describe my wedding dress. I was decked with heirlooms like a Christmas-tree. I looked quite hard and thick—it would have been quite possible to lift off my head and find chocolates in my neck, done up in silver paper!

SABIEN: My poor darling!

NADYA: But I was awfully popular, Sabien. The people loved me—and they wouldn't now. I've changed, you see.

SABIEN: Thank God for it!

NADYA: Alex was a great favourite, too, tall and soldierly and good-looking—everything that was required. We went away to the mountains for our honeymoon.

SABIEN: Wasn't he in love with you at all?

NADYA: No, not at all—but that didn't matter—nobody took it into consideration.

SABIEN: They wouldn't.

NADYA: On the first night we dined together Alex got drunk and I got panic-stricken. It must have been awfully funny. He began playing pretend games—beastly pretend games—that I was his slave or something, then he tried to chase me round the room, but I wouldn't run—I just giggled and giggled from sheer nerves and terror. And

it irritated him—not unnaturally. He wanted me to play up and scream. Then he started to frighten me with awful stories—ghosts and murders and things—and my heart stopped still inside me and I went on giggling—like a half-wit!

SABIEN: What a brute!

NADYA: We went back to Rodelle—the capital—after our celestial honeymoon. And we entertained a lot. You know—dreadful formalities and etiquette—I loathed it. Alex continued with an unbroken succession of mistresses, some of which—the high-born ones—I was compelled to meet. They used to sneer at me behind their eyes and imagine I couldn't see.

SABIEN: But surely people must have guessed?

NADYA: Perhaps they did. But Alex was so good-looking and such a sportsman!

SABIEN: I see.

NADYA (*slowly*): Perhaps I was being prepared—prepared for something that is yet to come. There's nothing in the world like suffering for giving you a grip on things.

SABIEN: What nonsense you talk—there'll never be anything more you need be prepared for now—only happiness—perfect happiness. I'll see to that.

NADYA: I wonder.

SABIEN: Well, don't. It's foolish.

NADYA: I felt a little shiver then, it's all so warm and secure here, and the sun's just rising—but I felt a little shiver.

SABIEN: You're cold.

NADYA (*smiling*): No—not that sort of shiver.

SABIEN: We won't go to Krayia after all—even when we're married, it would make you too sad.

NADYA (*looking down*): Perhaps it would—but all the same I should like to—one day. You see, I was born there, and—and—oh, well, I feel as though it belonged to me—or I belonged to it—or something!

SABIEN: Anyhow, I've got a plan.

NADYA: What sort of plan?

SABIEN: Let's carry out the day more or less as arranged, but instead of driving in the Bois after lunch—let's be married—straight away.

NADYA: But, my dear, we *can't!* Nothing's ready.

SABIEN: Nothing has to be, really—except us.

NADYA: Everyone will be furious if we do it secretly; they're all looking forward to Thursday, and the party.

SABIEN: Well, I'm not. I'm a little sick of parties, and everybody we know flocking around us. I'd much sooner get it over quietly and go away with you alone.

NADYA (*suddenly*): Yes. We will! We'll do that. There'll have to be witnesses.

SABIEN: Suzanne, of course.

NADYA: Yes, we'll call her up early.

SABIEN: And Maurice. He'd be so hurt if he weren't in it.

NADYA: I shan't go to bed at all.

SABIEN: Either shall I.

NADYA: We'll go straight off afterwards and leave them to do the explaining.

SABIEN: Excellent—they'll love that.

NADYA: It's going to be a lovely day, too—look at it.

SABIEN: The traffic's just beginning.

NADYA: Everything's just beginning.

SABIEN: Let's ring up Suzanne now.

NADYA: It's six o'clock! Dare we?

SABIEN: I must—I simply must tell somebody or I shall go mad.

NADYA: She'll be furious! Dear Suzanne.

SABIEN: Livid! Dear Suzanne.

NADYA: Go on then.

SABIEN (*he takes up telephone and sits on edge of table*): Hallo—hallo—Élysée 1845—yes, 1845. She'll be in a deep thick sleep. The telephone's in her room, isn't it?

NADYA: Yes, by the bed. (*With relish.*) The bell going off in her ear like that will probably frighten her to death.

SABIEN: Does she sleep with her mouth open?

NADYA: I don't know—why?

SABIEN: I had an aunt once who always slept with her mouth open and somebody woke her up suddenly and she nearly bit her tongue off. (*He laughs.*)

NADYA: How awful! (*She laughs, too.*)

SABIEN: To bite one's tongue is one of the most painful things in the world. (*He shakes with laughter.*)

NADYA (*giggling helplessly*): Oh, do stop, Sabien!

SABIEN (*with the telephone shaking in his hand*): I can't—I've got weak——!

NADYA: Do stop—Suzanne will be so cross.

SABIEN (*hysterically*): Here she is! Is that you, Suzanne? (*He nods.*) It's her—Suzanne—I—we——! (*He breaks off into peals of laughter.*)

NADYA (*trying to control herself*): Give it to me, for

Heaven's sake. (*She snatches the telephone out of his hand.*) Is that you, Suzanne?

SABIEN: Judging by her voice, she's bitten *her* tongue right off!

NADYA: Listen, Suzanne—we——

She too breaks off into helpless laughter. They both stand there shaking.

It's no use—I can't say a word! (*She puts the receiver on and collapses into a chair.*)

SABIEN (*wiping his eyes*): She'll never speak to us again.

NADYA: Never. We've offended her for life.

SABIEN: Our best friend.

NADYA: Isn't it dreadful?

SABIEN: Dreadful!

They both laugh again. The telephone bell rings.

NADYA: There now! That's her!

SABIEN: Furious! Who's going to explain?

NADYA (*still laughing*): I'd better. (*She goes to the telephone.*) Hallo! Yes, Suzanne. Oh, darling, don't be so cross—no, really. (*To* SABIEN.) She's in a rage! (*To* SUZANNE.) I was only telling Sabien that you were in a rage, dear.—Yes, you are. I can hear your teeth chattering with fury. Well, listen—you must let us explain.—No, not in the least—he's as sober as a judge!—Because we have some important news for you—yes, frightfully important. We're going to be married to-day instead of Thursday.—Exactly.—We can't wait.—Don't be so nasty, Suzanne! Well, will you be a witness?—It doesn't matter in the least—no one will see you.—All right then, your blue. Can you get hold of Maurice?—Yes, that will do

splendidly. Laperouse at one o'clock.—All right—I shall be in till eleven, angel.—Good-bye. (*She hangs up receiver.*) She is a darling! Oh, Sabien, isn't it all divine?

SABIEN: Divine! To-day! I knew I shouldn't be able to exist until Thursday.

NADYA (*excitedly*): What's the time?

SABIEN: Quarter past six.

NADYA: I must wake up Zana. Have you got all the necessary papers—licences and things?

SABIEN: Yes, everything. I'll go back now and have a bath and change.

NADYA: Listen! Pick me up here at twelve. I simply must do a little shopping.

SABIEN (*taking her in his arms*): You see, this is probably the most perfect moment in the whole world—standing here alone with you, on the threshold of everything that's new and wonderful. Let's drink to our happiness!

NADYA: Darling, what a contented thing to do!

SABIEN: Never mind, if it is contented; a gesture of that sort gives one a lovely feeling. Where's the drink?

NADYA: I'll get it. Take two glasses out of the dining-room. (*She runs off.*)

SABIEN: All right. (*He goes off and returns in a moment with two glasses.*)

NADYA (*off*): Come and open the bottle, dear.

He goes off again. After a second's pause they both come on together with a bottle of champagne.

SABIEN: Here are the glasses.

NADYA: I'll pour it out—let me pour it out. Open the windows wide——

SABIEN (*opening both windows*): There—we'll stand in this glorious warm patch of sunlight.

NADYA: And drink to our happiness. (*She holds up her glass.*)

SABIEN (*holding up his glass*): Our own dear happiness—together—always.

They both drink.

The sun's gone in. How tactless of it!

NADYA (*defiantly*): It doesn't matter! (*She dashes her glass to the ground.*)

SABIEN: It doesn't matter. (*He does the same, and takes her in his arms.*)

CURTAIN

Scene II

A few hours later. When curtain rises Zana *is tidying up the room.* Nadya *is heard singing in the bathroom. There comes a ring at the front door bell.* Zana *goes off and opens the door. Enter* General Krish.

Krish: Your mistress is up already?

Zana: Yes, sir.

Krish: I must see her at once—it's very important.

Zana: I'll tell her, sir.

Krish: You remember me, Zana?

Zana: Yes, sir.

Krish: You haven't changed much, Zana.

Zana: No, sir.

Krish: Is your mistress well? Has she been happy all this time?

Zana: Yes, sir. (*She bursts into tears.*)

Krish (*quickly*): What's the matter? Why are you crying?

Zana (*controlling herself*): I beg your pardon, sir, I'm so frightened that—that—you're bringing bad news.

Krish: Very strange news—not all bad.

Zana (*haltingly*): She is to be married to-day.

Krish: What!

Zana: At two o'clock.

KRISH: Married—married! To whom, Zana?

ZANA: Mr. Pastal. Mr. Sabien Pastal.

KRISH: Sabien Pastal!

ZANA: They're very happy, sir. They love one another so much.

KRISH: Tell her I'm here, Zana.

ZANA: Yes, sir.

ZANA goes out. KRISH goes to the window and looks out. ZANA re-enters.

Madame will be with you in a moment, sir

KRISH: Thank you.

ZANA goes out. KRISH sees a large photograph of SABIEN in a frame; he bends down to scrutinise it. Enter NADYA. She is attired in an exquisite bath-wrap. Her face is set with apprehension.

NADYA: Krish!—Krish!

KRISH: My dear. (*He kisses her hand.*)

NADYA: It's so many years. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?

KRISH: There wasn't time.

NADYA: Tell me why you're here—suddenly—like this?

KRISH: I have news for you.

NADYA: From Krayia?

KRISH: Yes.

NADYA: It's no use bringing me news of Krayia—I've—I've forgotten Krayia.

KRISH: Have you?

NADYA: Yes. All that part of my life is finished for ever—I'm to be married to-day—I'm deeply in love. Oh, Krish, don't look at me like that. What has happened?

KRISH: You must summon together all your courage, Nadya. That splendid courage I've seen you display so often in the past. There's been a break in Krayia—a break in the line of succession. Your presence is absolutely necessary.

NADYA: My presence! Why—what do you mean?

KRISH: The King's brother died six months ago—you remember?

NADYA: Yes, yes—you wrote to me.

KRISH: There was to have been a marriage between the King and Mahlia of Styre quite soon. Styre is rich, and there would probably have been an heir to strengthen the entente between the two countries in the future.

NADYA: Yes?

KRISH: The King was assassinated four days ago.

NADYA: Assassinated! Michael assassinated!

KRISH: Yes, there had been a little trouble among the people—nothing very much—just a few riots down by the river and a public demonstration or two. There are always agitators and revolutionary fanatics of some sort working all the time. Michael has never been really popular, but we hoped the marriage would alter all that. He was ambushed when walking in the garden after dinner on Friday night and stabbed to death.

NADYA: Oh, how horrible! How horrible!

KRISH: The Salic Law still exists in Krayia. You are next.

NADYA: Krish, don't—don't say it

KRISH: You are the Queen now—by right of succession —it's unalterable.

There is a slight pause. Then NADYA *laughs a trifle hysterically.*

NADYA: There you are, you see! I knew it!—But it's all right—it's quite all right—I've thought it out just this minute. I can't be Queen, Krish—not possibly—because I'm dead.—You have arrived here and found that I had died weeks ago. You see, it's quite easy, isn't it?

KRISH (*shakes his head*): No.

NADYA: But it is! No one need ever know. I'll leave France to-day for England or America. It would be impossible to trace me under my married name—my married name—— (*Her voice breaks.*)

KRISH: My dear, don't—please don't——

NADYA (*wildly*): Give me this loophole—let me escape——

KRISH: My dear, you must control yourself.

NADYA: Control myself! Must my whole life be given over to controlling myself?

KRISH: Yes.

NADYA: Oh, you're not fair—you're not fair—you knew! You could have done something.

KRISH: There was nothing I could have done.

NADYA (*frantically*): I'll die rather than go back—I'll kill myself, d'you hear? Krish, in God's name save me—help me to escape—you can't possibly understand what it means to me. I thought years ago that I should never be happy again, that all capacity for joy and contentment had been drained dry by the bitterness of my married life. Since then I've been searching—hoping against hope—until at last—now—within these last few weeks I've found

what I was looking for. Sabien! He loves me better than anyone or anything in the world, and I love him—passionately, desperately. Everything else has been swept away from me. I've found freedom and happiness for the first time in my life. Don't take them from me—don't take them from me—don't take them from me——!

She has fallen on her knees sobbing hopelessly. KRISH *strokes her hair symphatically, then he raises her up on to the sofa beside him,*

KRISH (*gently*): Nadya, my dear—I've been travelling night and day—I'm so tired and hungry—could Zana make me a little breakfast?

NADYA: Oh, forgive me—yes, of course—you must be starving—Zana, Zana——

She wipes her eyes and makes every effort to control her emotion. Re-enter ZANA.

ZANA: Yes, madame?

NADYA: Some breakfast for the General—at once, as quickly as you can.

ZANA: What will you eat, sir?

KRISH: Anything—anything—some coffee.

ZANA: I'll make you an omelette.

KRISH: Capital. An omelette would save my life. Thank you, Zana.

Exit ZANA.

NADYA: Forgive me, dear Krish, not only for neglecting you, but for behaving so stupidly. You must understand I've been up all night, and I'm rather tired, too.

KRISH: You need never fear that I shall not understand —I know you so well.

NADYA: The old one perhaps, but I've changed a lot lately.

KRISH: Not really. You could never change.

NADYA: I'm fighting so hard now to be calm and face things. (*Her voice breaks.*) It's difficult——

KRISH (*taking her hand*): I know—I know.

NADYA: What am I to do?

KRISH: Cry, my dear—it will be a relief.

NADYA: No, I can't—there's no time—we must think of a plan quite quietly—something subtle that will put everything right.

KRISH: Don't batter yourself against the bars, it's useless. You must give in.

NADYA: I want to be ordinary and happy—just absolutely ordinary, with Sabien to love, and to love me. Why can't I be like other people with the right to control my Destiny—just a little?

KRISH: No one can control their Destiny—even other people.

NADYA: You're sitting there knowing for certain that I'm going to give in—aren't you?—aren't you?

KRISH: Yes, Nadya.

NADYA: You're wrong—I won't. If I had lived all the time in Krayia it would have been different. But I broke away—and that's altered everything. It's such a tiny little country—what can it matter really—in the end?

KRISH: It should matter to you most of all—you are the Queen.

NADYA (*rising suddenly*): Look at me—look at me! A fine Queen I should make—it's ridiculous. I've been to

parties every night for the last months—some of them damned rowdy ones. I've been drunk several times—yes, drunk, and noisy. I've had lovers, like any of the other women. I went to Deauville with a beastly little Italian last year; we used to have disgusting scenes in the hotel and the Casino, and we lost every sou we had. Then he left me, and I consoled myself with an American—quite nice with wavy hair—— (*She laughs.*) Anyhow, there's nothing like being cosmopolitan. Perhaps I've been subconsciously following the example set by my late lamented husband. God rest his soul! He'd have liked me much better as I am now than as I was then. I should understand and play up. I often think I may have misjudged Alex a bit; we might have had great fun if only I hadn't been so stupid! Poor old Alex——

KRISH: He was a cad and a libertine.

NADYA: Yes, wasn't he? Libertine describes him beautifully, and it's such a lovely word, too. I'm a libertine as well now. I've had a wonderful time in Paris, Krish, all among the people who are just *not* received in polite society. You see they've nearly all started life high up and been knocked off their perches into the mud. Some of us dope, and some of us drink, and some of us merely go in for undiluted love in varying doses. Oh, it's all most amusing, and such an excellent finishing school for those destined to fill high positions, gives one the requisite grip on things, and that perfect control and dignity—— (*She breaks off suddenly.*) Oh, don't you see how utterly ludicrous it is? What absolute nonsense? Me Royal? Laugh with me, Krish, at the fantastic absurdity of it. A ruler of a country

—the divine right of kings and queens—applied to me? Oh, no. No! No! (*She turns away, still laughing, and brushes her eyes with the back of her hand.*)

KRISH: You haven't deceived me a bit—you haven't even deceived yourself.

NADYA (*vehemently*): But it's true—it's all true—I've done these things. Did you think I was only acting to deceive you? It's true, I tell you.

KRISH: I know; I've known all along.

NADYA: Then you must see how completely out of the question it is. I'm entirely and absolutely unworthy to fill the throne of Krayia for a day——

KRISH: Krayia doesn't want your past, it wants your future.

NADYA (*passionately*): Oh, don't, don't! Sabien said that to me—just a short time ago.

KRISH: Sabien must be sacrificed.

NADYA: It's amazing—that cold detachment—Sabien must be sacrificed. Do you realise what those words mean to me? You're silly, standing there and saying things like that. Sabien must be sacrificed—Sabien must be sacrificed. Oh, Krish, why do you take up such a firm attitude? Why don't you come to my side for a little and think quite quietly and calmly? There may be a small loophole somewhere, if only we can find it.

KRISH (*sitting down and drawing her down beside him*): Come, then, we'll think. Have you any suggestions?

NADYA: What I said at first—you arrived here to find that I had died a few weeks ago.

KRISH: That could be proved untrue by the first Krayian newspaper man that cared to investigate.

NADYA: What would have happened if when you came in I was already married to Sabien?

KRISH: The marriage would have to be annulled.

NADYA: Why couldn't he reign with me?

KRISH: Mainly because the people wouldn't stand it for a moment. A commoner, and a foreigner at that.

NADYA: If I sit here and say "No" without anger or resentment or emotion, just "No" firmly, and stick to it, what then?

KRISH: You can't say "No."

NADYA: You're so sure.

KRISH: Yes, quite sure. You see, to be born Royal is to be born in a cage. And however well the bars may be concealed by trees and mountains and the roofs of Paris, they're there just the same always. Your country comes first. Even before Sabien, and love and happiness—you can't help yourself.

NADYA: The air is full of democracy and freedom.

KRISH: The air is full of the voices of cheap people, crying out against the existing order of things, trying to tear down kings and queens and loyalties and establish themselves on the throne in their shirt-sleeves with their feet on the mantelpiece.

Re-enter ZANA *with a breakfast tray which she places on a small table and carries it to the General.*

Thank you, Zana, that's simply splendid.

ZANA: There's more coffee when you want it, sir.

KRISH: Excellent!

ZANA goes out. KRISH devotes himself comfortably to his breakfast.

NADYA: What would be the use of me as Queen, without hope, or energy, or even love for my country?

KRISH: Love for your country is born in you; not all the ill-treatment and misery in the world can dispel it when it's ingrained.

NADYA: That all sounds very fine, but are you certain it's true?

KRISH: Absolutely certain.

NADYA: Certain that the love of my country will rise supreme in me and help me to rule my people well and truly and for the best?

KRISH: Yes. You will have a lot to fight, too. As I told you, there are anarchists everywhere—working for revolution.

NADYA: They may assassinate me. That would be funny, after all your trouble!

KRISH (*drily*): Very funny.

NADYA: What time is the train?

KRISH: Noon.

NADYA (*calling*): Zana—Zana——

ZANA (*entering*): Yes, Madame?

NADYA: Pack everything up as quickly as possible, Zana; we're going back to Krayia.

ZANA (*biting her lip to control herself*): To Krayia?

NADYA: Yes. You *will* come with me, won't you, Zana?

ZANA: Yes, Madame.

NADYA: If you'd rather stay behind in Paris—I shall understand.

ZANA (*chokily*): I'd rather go with you, Madame.

NADYA (*going to her*): Don't cry—we have so much before us. I shall need your help a lot.

ZANA (*pulling herself together*): Yes, Madame.

She goes out. NADYA *goes over to her desk and seats herself at it.*

NADYA: I must write a note to Sabien saying good-bye. Then I'll dress. We haven't over-much time.

KRISH: There is a private saloon reserved for you. Everything is arranged.

NADYA (*half turning in her chair and looking at* KRISH): I wonder if I shall ever see him again.

CURTAIN

ACT II

TIME: *A year later.*

SCENE: *The Queen's private apartments in the Royal Palace at Rodelle, Krayia.*

It is a very simple room beautifully furnished. At the back, centre, is a door leading into the bedroom. Up right there is a door leading to ZANA'S *room and a service staircase. Up left there are double doors leading to an ante-room, and down left a large French window opening on to a balcony.*

At Rise: MISS PHIPPS *is standing on the balcony, discernible to the audience. She is holding a pair of mother-of-pearl opera-glasses to her eyes.*

MISS PHIPPS: Zana—Zana—come here quickly—the state carriage has passed through the gates.

ZANA *comes in from right and runs out on to the balcony, too.*

ZANA: It's lovely, isn't it? All those colours!

MISS PHIPPS: How fortunate that the weather held over!

ZANA (*raptly*): Look at her standing on the steps! Doesn't she look wonderful?

MISS PHIPPS: She's laughing. I don't think she ought to laugh.

ZANA: It's the General whispering—he always amuses her.

MISS PHIPPS: If it had been in England, the Queen would have met them at the station.

ZANA: It's much better as it is.

MISS PHIPPS: There—they're getting out—he's very tall and dignified.

ZANA: So is the Duchess, true to type. Zalgans are always like that.

MISS PHIPPS (*excitedly*): She's kissed the Duchess, now he's kissing her hand—hark at the cheering!

ZANA: They sound all right, don't they? No signs of a disturbance.

MISS PHIPPS: Thank God for that! I was terrified last night, all that shouting, and the firing down by the west gate.

ZANA: It wasn't anything much.

MISS PHIPPS: Now they're going in——(*She screams.*) Look! What's happening!

There is the sound of a shot, then a lot of screaming and yelling.

ZANA: They're shooting! They're shooting! (*She stops up her ears and jumps back into the room.*)

MISS PHIPPS: No, no, only one shot—somebody in the crowd, look at the commotion going on.

ZANA: Is she hurt! Is she hurt?

MISS PHIPPS: No, he missed, whoever it was.

ZANA (*venturing out on to the balcony again*): Has she gone in?

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, it's all right, no one's hurt—listen! They've started the Anthem——

The Krayian National Anthem is heard. It swells louder and louder as the crowd takes it up.

ZANA (*excitedly*): Come on—we'll sing it too—we'll sing it from here.

They both sing it; as the music dies away, they stop singing and come into the room.

MISS PHIPPS: All the festivities are over now, until to-night. Everyone's going home.

ZANA: It was an anarchist I suppose—brutes!

MISS PHIPPS: So unpleasant—just as the Prince was arriving.

ZANA: He's handsome, isn't he?

MISS PHIPPS: I couldn't see clearly enough to judge.

ZANA: I'm glad he's handsome, like his photographs. She'll probably grow very fond of him.

MISS PHIPPS: We will not discuss the matter, if you please.

ZANA: Why not? She wouldn't mind.

MISS PHIPPS: It would be better if you did not refer to Her Majesty as "she" quite so often, Zana.

ZANA: You did, just now on the balcony. You said you didn't think she ought to laugh.

MISS PHIPPS: That will do, Zana.

ZANA: I've been with her all my life nearly—all that time in Paris. She knows I call her "she."

MISS PHIPPS (*sternly*): That will *do*, Zana. I have letters to write.

ZANA: Well, it's no use settling down now, *she'll* be up in a minute!

ZANA *flounces off*. MISS PHIPPS, *with an exclamation*

of annoyance, goes over to bureau and begins to sort over some letters. Two pages in royal livery throw open the double doors and NADYA *enters followed by* GENERAL KRISH. *She is wearing an exceedingly beautiful white and silver dress, with an enormous train. She also wears a small diamond and silver coronet. She sinks down wearily in chair, right.*

NADYA: Thank Heaven that's over! It was nerve-racking.

KRISH: We've caught the fellow—I saw him being led away. He'll be tried and shot.

NADYA: Oh, I didn't mean that only, the whole affair was nerve-racking—I'm getting used to sudden shots and screams. (*She calls.*) Zana—Zana——

ZANA (*entering*): You called, Madame?

NADYA: Yes, Zana, take this. (*She takes off her coronet.*) And put out something really cool—I want to rest for a little while.

ZANA: Yes, Madame.

She takes the coronet and goes off. NADYA *pats her hair into place.*

MISS PHIPPS: Is there anything I can do for you, Your Majesty?

NADYA: Yes, Miss Phipps, presently I want you to telephone through to Prince Keri's apartments. (*To* KRISH.) Krish, dear, hand me an apple, they're in the bowl behind you.

MISS PHIPPS *goes off into ante-room.* KRISH *hands bowl and* NADYA *takes an apple.*

NADYA: Won't you have one, too?

KRISH: No, thank you.

NADYA (*biting apple*): I really do feel quite exhausted. I suppose it was standing on those steps in the blazing sun.

KRISH: You were wonderfully calm when the shot was fired.

NADYA (*smiling*): What did you expect me to do, rush shrieking indoors?

KRISH: No, but it's pleasant to see you living up to my ideal of you.

NADYA: Thank you, Krish, you say very sweet things sometimes.

KRISH: The blackguard fired point-blank at you, but a man standing behind him had the presence of mind to jerk his arm up.

NADYA: How nice of him!

KRISH: I suggest that you give him a brief audience some time during the afternoon and thank him personally.

NADYA (*without enthusiasm*): Very well. Perhaps he'll turn out to be an anarchist himself and stab me!

KRISH: Every precaution will be taken.

NADYA: Don't look so solemn, Krish. Send him up at five or half-past.

KRISH: By the by, is Miss Phipps proving satisfactory?

NADYA: Very—it was a splendid idea of yours. There's something so comforting about the English point of view, specially in a crisis.

KRISH: Was she frightened last night?

NADYA: Yes, but she never showed it until it was all over.

KRISH: Excellent!

NADYA: Why?

KRISH: Nothing—I just wondered.

NADYA: How is everything going? Have you any news, any particular news?

KRISH: No, things are still very serious, whether it develops into a revolution or not, depends upon the next few weeks.

NADYA: Weeks! I should say days.

KRISH: I think the wedding will check it. Keri looked exceedingly attractive, and several women threw flowers into the carriage—such a good sign.

NADYA: If there's a revolution I shall have to escape—fly the country?

KRISH: Yes, but don't worry—I hardly——

NADYA: And it will all have been for nothing! It seems a pity, doesn't it?

KRISH: It won't come to that.

NADYA: I wonder.

KRISH: Would you be glad?

NADYA: No, I should be disgusted with myself. I should have failed.

KRISH: Everything will come right yet.

NADYA: Everything?

KRISH (*firmly*): Yes—everything.

NADYA: You continue to be a comfort too beautifully, Krish. I love watching you.

KRISH (*smiling*): I'm glad.

NADYA: I often wonder what really goes on inside your brain. You always appear placid and undisturbed, even

with your beloved country trembling on the verge of revolution.

KRISH: My beloved country has trembled on the verge so many times before that I'm quite hardened to it by now; also, I have an instinctive faith in you.

NADYA: It's very nice of you to say so, but I'm afraid your faith is sadly misplaced. After all, I'm the main cause of the trouble—my flaming past!

KRISH: The trouble was just as bad before you came.

NADYA: No, it wasn't—not quite. The fact of my being on the throne has inspired these fanatics with a positive frenzy of rage. They've carefully unearthed every folly I've ever committed and invented several that I haven't, in order to incite the people against me! And they're succeeding. You know they're succeeding.

KRISH: So far and no further. You're not really unpopular with the large majority, in spite of their efforts.

NADYA: Sometimes I feel absolutely hopeless.

KRISH: Well, don't; it never does any good.

NADYA: To have tried so hard, and to be rebuffed on all sides. For things to get steadily worse instead of better—it's heartbreaking.

KRISH: Surely you didn't expect to do much in a year? It's such a short time.

NADYA: A short time! (*She smiles.*) I wonder if every year of my life will seem as long as this one has been?

KRISH: After to-morrow you will have Keri to share your burdens.

NADYA: Yes. I'm glad of that.

KRISH: I think you'll find everything growing perceptibly easier quite soon.

NADYA: I wonder what he feels about it all.

KRISH: Judging by the charming smile with which he greeted you, I should say he was very happy.

NADYA: Yes, it was a nice smile, wasn't it? But I shouldn't say very happy. Very kind, perhaps, but not very happy. (*She leans over and rings bell on bureau.*) I'm going to talk to him now on the telephone. Don't go.

Re-enter MISS PHIPPS.

Will you get through to Prince Keri now, please, Miss Phipps? Tell him I want to speak to him.

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, Your Majesty. (*She goes to telephone.*)

NADYA: I felt a little alarmed by the Duchess.

KRISH: You needn't have been. I believe she is very charming.

MISS PHIPPS (*at telephone*): Hallo—please put me through to His Royal Highness Prince Keri immediately.

KRISH: . . . I used to know her years ago. She was lovely as a girl.

NADYA: She still is, I think. I love those sort of looks. Her hat was perfect.

MISS PHIPPS (*at telephone*): Her Majesty desires to speak to His Royal Highness, if you please. (*To* NADYA.) He's coming to the telephone, Your Majesty.

She rises and stands aside. NADYA gets up and goes *to telephone.*

NADYA (*at telephone*): Hallo—hallo—is that you? Yes, it's me.—I hope you're comfortable and everything—splendid.—Listen, we're not supposed to meet again

officially until dinner to-night, so I thought you might like to come along and talk to me now for a little. I'm sure there's lots of ice that needs breaking.—What! —Oh, that's awfully sweet of you.—Well, I'm very pleased so far—— (*She laughs.*) No, I don't expect so. Will you ask Her Excellency to come, too?—We'll all have tea and relax thoroughly. (*She hangs up receiver.*) He's coming now. Stay and receive him while I go and take off this particularly heavy train.

KRISH: Of course I will.

She gives him her hand to kiss, and goes off into the bedroom.

MISS PHIPPS *begins to go towards the door.*

Please don't go, Miss Phipps, I want to speak to you.

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, General.

KRISH: Perhaps you'd sit down for a moment? (*He holds out a chair.*)

MISS PHIPPS (*sitting*): Thank you.

KRISH: What I am going to say is confidential—you understand?

MISS PHIPPS: Quite, General.

KRISH: I suppose you don't by any chance possess a dying sister anywhere, do you?

MISS PHIPPS (*alarmed*): I hope not. Muriel was quite well last week. I heard on Tuesday. What do you mean? Are you trying to break something to me?

KRISH (*hurriedly*): No, no, no—you misunderstand——

MISS PHIPPS: Her constitution's particularly strong. Even when we were all down with mumps I remember Muriel——

KRISH: My dear Miss Phipps, I have no reason for supposing that your sister isn't in excellent health. I only thought we might perhaps use her as an excuse.

MISS PHIPPS: An excuse! For what?

KRISH: In case you wished to leave Her Majesty's service—suddenly!

MISS PHIPPS: Leave!—Why—what? I don't understand. Am I not satisfactory?

KRISH: You're perfectly satisfactory—in fact, it is a great comfort to me to feel that Her Majesty should have someone by her—so reliable—and—er—steady as yourself.

MISS PHIPPS: Thank you, General, I'm sure I——

KRISH: I am taking this opportunity of warning you. Krayia, I regret to say, is—at the moment—in a very grave state.

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, General.

KRISH: Even Her Majesty herself is not aware of the full seriousness of the situation. I'm afraid that nothing now can avert a revolution. If we can manage to tide over to-morrow's ceremony there may be a chance, but a very slender one.

MISS PHIPPS: You mean that it may start—to-night?

KRISH: Yes.

MISS PHIPPS: How very tiresome—for Her Majesty and you and the Prince and everybody——

KRISH: You are an Englishwoman and therefore entitled to consideration as a guest in this country. A car will be put at your disposal and you could be across the frontier by midnight.

Miss Phipps: I'm exceedingly grateful to you, General, but on the whole I think I'd rather stay. I can take care of myself. Also I have a lot of important letters to write for Her Majesty after tea. (*She rises.*)

Krish (*shaking hands with her*): Thank you, Miss Phipps. I didn't think it would be any use.

Miss Phipps *goes out. The General smiles to himself and goes to the telephone.*

(*At telephone.*) Hallo—hallo—put me through to Captain Myrtais, please.—Yes—General Krish speaking. (*Pause.*) Hallo—is that you, Myrtais?—Yes. Have you found the man who saved Her Majesty's life this afternoon?—What?—Staying at the Imperial Hotel.—Well, will you see that he is in the palace at five o'clock. Her Majesty wishes to thank him personally.—Yes, I shall probably be here.—Ring through when he arrives.

He hangs up receiver and walks down to the window. The Pages *throw open the double doors.*

Pages (*announcing*): His Royal Highness Prince Keri of Zalgar.

Prince Keri *enters. He is dressed in the uniform of a Colonel of the Zalgar Hussars.*

Krish: Her Majesty told me to receive you; she is putting on something cool.

Keri (*shaking hands*): How sensible!

Krish (*offering him cigarette-case*): Perhaps you'll smoke?

Keri (*smiling*): No, thank you—not yet.

Krish: Hot, isn't it?

Keri: Extremely.

KRISH: Do you play bridge?

KERI: Yes, brilliantly.

KRISH: Good.

KERI: Why?

KRISH: I hope when opportuntiy offers you will teach Her Majesty.

KERI: I shall be charmed.

KRISH: She has no head for cards.

KERI: What a pity!

KRISH: It is very worrying.

KERI: Is she fond of the opera?

KRISH: Passionately.

KERI: Splendid.

KRISH: With the exception of 'Faust.

KERI: Naturally.

KRISH: Do you sing at all?

KERI: Oh, yes, sometimes.

KRISH: Tenor or baritone?

KERI: It depends on my mood.

KRISH: I understand.

KERI: I have some very good soprano notes in the earlier part of the day.

KRISH: Excellent.

KERI: No technique, you know, but exquisite 'timbre.'

KRISH: You should be very happy here; we're an exceedingly musical nation.

KERI: How awful!

NADYA *enters from her room in a soft clinging tea-gown.*

NADYA: This really is very charming of you.

KERI (*kissing her hand*): I am enchanted. My aunt will join us presently.

NADYA: I'm so glad.

KRISH: If she would allow it, I should be charmed to wait upon Her Excellency and escort her here.

KERI: I'm sure she'd be delighted. You're very kind.

KRISH: Your Majesty. (*He kisses her hand.*)

NADYA: Thank you, Krish.

KRISH *bows to the Prince and goes out.*

It's better that we should be able to talk a little together first.

KERI: Quite. That is the reason I came on ahead. I do hope you're not tired after this afternoon's ordeal.

NADYA: Not at all, thank you. It wasn't such a very dreadful ordeal.

KERI: Surely to be fired at by a frenzied anarchist and meet a perfectly strange *fiancé* all in the course of ten minutes must be a little unnerving?

NADYA: Perhaps I shall suffer a hysterical reaction later on. Won't you sit down?

KERI: Not just yet, if you don't mind. This is such an important moment in my life I prefer to face it standing.

NADYA: Is it—so important?

KERI: You sounded so nice on the telephone, now you're a little antagonistic. Will you tell me why?

NADYA: I don't know. I don't mean to be antagonistic. I'm sorry.

KERI: I'm horribly nervous.

NADYA (*smiling*): Are you—are you really?

KERI: Of course.

NADYA: That makes me feel a little better.

KERI: I thought it would.

NADYA: I was perfectly happy talking to you on the telephone, but somehow when I met you face to face I could have shrieked from sheer panic! I heard your voice talking to Krish and it suddenly dawned on me that we are to be married to-morrow. That's what unhinged me! Until that moment I'd sort of taken it for granted without really thinking about it.

KERI: It's rather funny, you know.

NADYA: And rather pathetic, too.

KERI: I think I'll sit down now. The worst's over.

NADYA (*handing him cigarette-box*): Do, and smoke and be comfortable.

There is a long pause.

I feel that there's such a lot to say, and yet I don't know where to begin.

KERI: Let's forget for a little while all the diplomatic machinery that's brought us together and make a few plans for our personal happiness.

NADYA (*quizzically*): Happiness?

KERI (*smiling*): Well, as near as we can get.

NADYA: What a strange situation it is! It seems so far away and unreal. I don't feel in the least as though we were actual individuals on the eve of marriage.

KERI: We're not individuals. We're political puppets on strings. It's very labour-saving in the end.

NADYA: Are you pretending you like it?

KERI: Yes.

NADYA: Well, don't pretend. You know it's hateful and so do I.

KERI: I don't think it's going to be quite as hateful as I feared.

NADYA: Thank you.

KERI: You know I came here fully prepared to treat you to a little diplomatic love-making! Nothing sincere, of course, just enough to establish a correct atmosphere between us.

NADYA: Well, why don't you begin?

KERI: I'm afraid you'd laugh.

NADYA: I expect I should. Don't let's have any pretences about our marriage—anyhow, in private.

KERI: You won't object if I devour you with eyes of passion in public now and again, will you?

NADYA: Not if you feel it's really necessary.

KERI: Well, I think so, to-morrow certainly. It will give a sort of 'cachet' to the wedding.

NADYA: I'm afraid it will all be very tiring. I shall take asperin before the ceremony.

KERI: So shall I.

NADYA: Do you take the tablets whole, or crushed in water?

KERI: Whole, they're easier to swallow.

NADYA: So do I. We have a lot in common.

KERI: I am glad. It will make things so much nicer.

NADYA: Are you ambitious? Ambitious for Krayia, I mean?

KERI: Yes, I want to make a success of everything. Don't you?

NADYA: It's the only thing left to me.

KERI: I understand.

NADYA: So far I've been a miserable failure and I really have tried. It's like being on a desert island with raging seas round me all the time—rising! Sometimes I fear that they will engulf me altogether.

KERI: It's a perilous position.

NADYA: You realise that?

KERI: Of course I do. That's why I've come to help, I don't mind fighting a bit. The only thing I've lacked so far is a definite goal.

NADYA: Will Krayia supply that?

KERI: Yes. I want to see it a peaceful and happy country, and I want to see you a peaceful and happy woman. I think from the trouble in your eyes that you deserve to be.

NADYA: Thank you. That's very dear of you and very kind.

KERI: I hear that there was some rioting last night!

NADYA: Yes, nothing much in itself, but ominous under existing circumstances.

KERI: I'd like to get hold of those damned agitators and shoot them without trial.

NADYA: It would only make things worse in the end. They nearly shot me without trial this afternoon.

KERI: I half expected something of the sort. It was wonderfully dramatic, like a romantic play. All the bright colours and the sunshine and you standing serenely at the

top of the steps with diamonds glittering in your hair. I was waiting for you to stretch out your arms and cry "My People! My People!"

NADYA: Oh, no, that will come when the revolution really starts, and the palace is besieged by a howling mob with torches.

KERI: And scythes! I insist on scythes.

NADYA: I shall come out on to the balcony, all in white, with a baby in my arms.

KERI: I'm afraid it will have to be a borrowed baby.

NADYA: Never mind. Every mother in that crowd will fling down her scythe and go home.

KERI: And the revolution will be over.

NADYA: And we shall reign happily ever after! (*She sighs.*) How impossible real life is, isn't it?

KERI: It has its splendid moments.

NADYA: They're desperately short.

KERI (*looking down*): Yes—*desperately* short.

NADYA: I suppose, later on—one won't mind so much.

KERI: It depends—there are nearly always compensations of some sort.

NADYA: Are there?

KERI: Oh, yes, the only difficulty is recognising them.

NADYA: You think it's a bad plan to dwell too much on 'might have beens'?

KERI: What's the use?

NADYA: No use at all—you're perfectly right—a little cold-blooded perhaps.

KERI (*smiling*): Cold-blooded!

NADYA: Well, shall we say 'Detached'?

KERI: I'm glad you think that. I do try so hard.

NADYA: Is it very uphill work?

KERI: Sometimes.

NADYA: There are moments when the whole business seems utterly futile, don't you think?

KERI: Those are dangerous moments.

NADYA: I know.

KERI: Cheer up!

NADYA: I'm not depressed really.

KERI: Good.

NADYA: But I feel rather strange.

KERI: How surprising!

NADYA: You're laughing at me.

KERI: Please forgive me.

NADYA: I like it—I'm rather given to being intense every now and then—you do understand, don't you?

KERI: Perfectly.

NADYA: And unless I'm curbed I become a bore.

KERI: Is this a warning?

NADYA: Yes—you see we know so awfully little about one another really, it's only fair to put up a few sign-posts.

KERI: I don't believe they're going to be nearly as necessary as you think.

NADYA: I hope not.

KERI: Being in the same boat helps.

NADYA: Are we?

KERI: I think so.

NADYA: As a matter of fact, I felt it instinctively when we first met—in that glaring sun.

KERI (*smiling*): You were quite right.

NADYA: And here we are—both of us—with so much responsibility, so much to face, and so much to do. Permanently out of reach of our heart's desire.

KERI: What is your true heart's desire?

NADYA (*quietly*): To return to the man I love, and live a sweet life without hills or valleys. Just the smooth level of peace all the time. I do ache for it so.

KERI: Something else in common—our heart's desire.

NADYA: Is she alive?

KERI: Oh, yes, she's alive, but she's far away and there's no chance of my ever seeing her again—anyhow, until it's too late.

NADYA: Is it ever too late?

KERI: Yes.

NADYA: You mean when we've grown old?

KERI: When we're really middle-aged, it's not happy when one has lived on memories and dreams, to come suddenly face to face again with the inspiration of those dreams, middle-aged, too, grey and tired and perhaps fat.

NADYA: I suppose love isn't proof against that?

KERI: Not love, affection perhaps, that lasts always, but not love—our kind of love.

NADYA: How sad it all is!

KERI: Yes, but quite inevitable. It's no use pretending to ourselves that these fires within us can go on burning indefinitely without fuel. They'll die down to ashes in so many years and we shall be content to let them.

NADYA: Shall we ever forget entirely, I wonder?

KERI: Never, because we're sentimentalists. Rabid sentimentalists.

NADYA: I suppose we are.

KERI: Of course we are. There'll always be wistful moments in our lives when we shall shed tears for what might have been. But after a while they'll only be crocodile tears.

The PAGES *fling open the double doors.*

PAGES (*announcing*): Her Excellency the Grand Duchess Emilie of Zalgar. General Krish.

The DUCHESS *enters followed by* KRISH.

DUCHESS (*advancing*): My dear, what a perfectly *delightful* plan of yours! I was afraid I shouldn't get an opportunity of talking to you at all, except in public. I'm staying such a *short* while and we're all going to be so *dreadfully* occupied.

NADYA: It's very charming of you to waive ceremony like this.

DUCHESS: I'm sure I'm only too *glad*. Ceremony is odious at any time, but in this heat it's positively *shattering*.

NADYA: We'll have some iced tea at once, *à l'Américaine*.

DUCHESS: Do you mean in those lovely tall glasses filled with lumps of ice?

NADYA (*ringing bell*): Yes.

DUCHESS: How *too* delicious! I remember that and Coney Island were the only sensations I really enjoyed in the whole United States.

KERI: We were there in terrifically hot weather.

ZANA *enters wheeling a table on which are four long glasses filled with ice. In addition to the usual paraphernalia of afternoon tea.* KERI *arranges the* DUCHESS

comfortably in an armchair. KRISH *hands her a small cake-stand containing petits fours, etc.*

DUCHESS: I do hope you and Keri have taken a fancy to one another. It will make life so much easier for you.

NADYA: I believe we have.

DUCHESS: Splendid!

She takes a cake proffered by KRISH.

How delicious, thank you so much—it's wonderful after years of rigid dieting to be able to give in like this without a qualm.

KERI: I never remember you denying yourself very much, Aunt Emilie.

DUCHESS: General Krish—ever since you greeted me on the steps that afternoon, I've been racking my brains to think where we'd met before. Now I remember. The Venetian Carnival at Styre.

KRISH: Yes, the Venetian Carnival. It was many years ago.

DUCHESS: Do you really remember, or are you just being polite to me?

KRISH: I really remember. You wore a plum-coloured domino with a mask of silver lace.

DUCHESS (*taking glass of tea from* KERI): The domino was maroon, but I expect some plums are maroon, too. (*To* NADYA.) It was a lovely night, I was just nineteen and engaged for the first time. There was a brilliant moon, and we glided about in little coloured gondolas. It seems a pity that you and Keri shouldn't be given romantic opportunities like that!

NADYA: It would be a still greater pity to have the opportunities and disregard them.

DUCHESS (*looking from one to the other*): I see. So you've decided to start your lives together on a basis of friendship only?

KERI: Yes—if we can.

NADYA (*glancing at him*): I think we can.

DUCHESS: How sensible of you! Of course, in some ways you miss a lot, but it's *much* less fatiguing in the long run.

NADYA (*laughing*): I'm sure it is.

KRISH: Looked at from that angle, a political marriage really doesn't seem so bad.

DUCHESS: Well, I've found it the most satisfactory way of all, it's infinitely easier to follow other people's machinations than your own heart.

NADYA (*vehemently*): No! Follow your heart always—if possible!

DUCHESS: That sounds all very fine in theory, but in practice it's often *dismally* unsuccessful. I've done it several times with the most *devastating* results.

KERI: Perhaps, Aunt Emilie, your own particular heart hasn't a very good bump of locality!

DUCHESS: I've always been so dreadfully self-conscious in love. (*To* NADYA.) Haven't you?

NADYA: Yes, perhaps I have.

DUCHESS: I've had three husbands, you know.

NADYA: Were you pleased with them?

DUCHESS: Not pleased exactly—but keenly interested.

KERI: You'd never believe, looking at her now, that

Aunt Emilie was once the most romantic figure in the whole history of our country.

DUCHESS: That was many years ago.

NADYA: Before any of the husbands?

DUCHESS: No, during the first one.

NADYA: Did you ever run away?

DUCHESS: Yes, but I soon came back—as we all do.

NADYA: It's strange, isn't it?

DUCHESS: Self-sacrifice in our walk of life has almost ceased to be strange any more.

KERI: Just monotonous.

DUCHESS: Exactly.

NADYA: It's high time someone broke the tradition.

DUCHESS (*looking at her sharply*): I said that once.

NADYA (*with vehemence*): Why didn't you do it, then?

DUCHESS: For the same reason that will prevent you.

KRISH: May I have a little more tea, please?

NADYA: Of course—I'm so sorry. (*She pours some into his glass.*)

DUCHESS: It's all right, General, I'm never indiscreet when I'm sure of my ground.

NADYA: Thank you.

DUCHESS: I mean it—pleasant surprises loosen the tongue very agreeably.

NADYA: You're being awfully charming to me—I hope I shan't burst into tears.

DUCHESS: We'll leave broken romance and coronets and talk of gayer things.

NADYA: How I envy you!

DUCHESS: That's very sweet of you—do tell me why.

NADYA: To have got through your life so well and be quite amused and happy—I'm sure you've been amused always—even through your tragedies.

DUCHESS: It's nice to think that now anyhow.

NADYA: Will you teach me the secret?

DUCHESS: Just refrain from taking yourself too seriously.

NADYA: I'll try.

KERI: We'll try together.

The telephone bell rings.

KRISH: That's for me, I expect.

NADYA: Answer it anyhow, Krish dear.

KRISH *goes to telephone.*

Will you have some more tea, Duchess?

DUCHESS: No, thank you.

NADYA (*enquiringly*): Keri?

KERI *shakes his head, for* KRISH *has begun to speak.*

KRISH (*at telephone*): Hallo—yes, speaking, is that you, Myrtais? What? Oh, yes, what's his name? Florent—French, I suppose. (*To* NADYA.) The man who deflected that shot this afternoon is here. You promised him an audience.

NADYA: Tell them to send him up to the ante-room in ten minutes.

KRISH: Send him up to the ante-room in ten minutes. Her Majesty will see him then. Yes. . . . Oh, I see, very well, I'll come. (*He hangs up receiver.*)

DUCHESS: Oh, *don't* say you have to rush away to pressing military duties! There *were* so many questions I wanted to ask you.

KRISH: Do you think you could possibly hold them over until this evening?

DUCHESS: Yes, but there's no need to prepare a series of diplomatically evasive answers. They won't be political questions.

KRISH: How relieving! (*He kisses her hand.*)

NADYA: Come back at seven o'clock, Krish, I want your advice about several things.

KRISH: At your service—always. (*He kisses her hand, bows to* KERI, *and goes out.*)

NADYA: He's my greatest friend in the world.

DUCHESS: He's perfectly charming, and so delightfully true to type. Courteous, grey-haired, and efficient.

NADYA: He's the first cousin of Colonel Sapt in Zenda, you know.

DUCHESS: I might have guessed it. Men like that are *such* a comfort. No European court would be complete without them.

KERI: I remember old Sapt quite well. You see, father and Rupert of Hentzau were at school together.

DUCHESS: Is this man who is waiting for an audience with you one of your own guards or a complete stranger?

NADYA: A complete stranger—Krish thought it would be politic to thank him personally.

DUCHESS: He's quite right. Just give him a *dazzling* smile, and say you're *eternally* indebted to him, and he'll be loyal for life.

KERI: We need all the loyalty we can get just now.

DUCHESS: So does every other country.

NADYA: It was very unfortunate that it should have

happened just during your arrival. I was hoping to get through the day without any disturbance.

DUCHESS: Oh, please don't worry about me. I've been fired at *scores* of times, luckily the poor fools were so blinded by zeal that they didn't aim properly.

KERI: Aunt Emilie has passed unscathed through four revolutions.

DUCHESS: Five, dear, counting the small one when your Uncle Paul took to flying his kite in the public cemetery. He *loved* his kite!

NADYA (*smiling*): The lower classes are so touchy over that sort of thing.

The DUCHESS *rises.*

DUCHESS: Keri, I must go and rest now. (*To* NADYA.) It really has been most delightful—when the country's quietened down, you must come and stay for a little.

NADYA: I should love to.

KERI (*bending over her hand*): Until to-night.

NADYA (*gently*): Several loads have been lifted off my heart already—thank you.

DUCHESS: My visit to Krayia was really quite unnecessary, but I'd heard your story and was curious—please forgive me. (*She suddenly kisses her.*) You mustn't be disturbed over your temporary unpopularity. Your personal charm will outlive any past, however scarlet.

She goes out, followed by KERI. NADYA *stands silent for a moment, half smiling, then she turns.*

NADYA (*calling*): Zana—Zana——

ZANA (*entering*): Yes, Madame?

NADYA (*slipping a small ring from her finger and hold-*

ing it out to her): You've won your wager, Zana. Here it is.

ZANA (*hesitating*): Oh, Madame, I——

NADYA: Take it, Zana; don't be silly. You've reassured me over so many things, now one of your little reassurances has come true. He's an absolute dear.

ZANA (*taking the ring and curtseying*): Thank you, Madame. I knew he would be, from his photographs.

NADYA: How things change, don't they?

ZANA: Yes, Madame.

NADYA: I never used to see Krayia in the same light as I see it now.

ZANA: Perhaps it's because it belongs to you.

NADYA: It doesn't really, not until I can make the people like me. Oh, Zana, I do feel so different about it all now, I'm going to have someone to share my responsibilities, someone to whom I can turn for advice, someone to laugh with! He really has quite a delicious sense of humour; we giggled —actually giggled over the revolution!

ZANA (*startled*): The revolution—Oh, Madame.

NADYA: Oh, it doesn't matter! Even if it comes it won't last. He'll fight it—so shall I—and we'll get back! (*She flings out her arms.*) I can see ahead at last! Take away those tea-things quickly. I've got to see that man. He saved my life this afternoon—I'm going to thank him—I shall probably kiss him!

She rings bell. ZANA *hurriedly collects the scattered tea-things and placing them on the wheel-table, trundles it out of the room.*

MISS PHIPPS *enters.*

Is he there, Miss Phipps?

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, Your Majesty—with an armed escort.

NADYA: I'm sure that's unnecessary—I'll see him alone.

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, Your Majesty.

She goes out. NADYA *arranges her hair before mirror.*

TWO PAGES *enter.*

PAGES (*announcing*): Monsieur Florent.

SABIEN *enters. He is very pale and obviously trying to control his nerves.* NADYA *flings up her arm instinctively as though to shield herself.*

SABIEN: Nadya!

NADYA: Sabien! (*She buries her face in her hands.*) Oh, how could you be so cruel!

SABIEN (*trembling*): I—I couldn't help it.

NADYA: Go away from me.

SABIEN: I can't—not yet.

NADYA (*suddenly controlling herself*): You must.

SABIEN: No, Fate was with me in that crowd to-day. I can't go against Fate, can I?

He laughs rather pitifully.

NADYA: Go away.

SABIEN: When things happen like this, it can't be chance entirely.

NADYA (*pulling herself together*): It was unpardonable of you to come here.

SABIEN: I couldn't help myself. When you left Paris a year ago you took everything from me, not only love. I haven't been able to read, or listen to music, or see beauty in anything. It's as though I'd been struck deaf and blind.

NADYA: I don't know what to say to you.

SABIEN: You can restore to me a little flickering shadow of happiness by letting me stay and be near you for a little while. I want to hear you talk again.

NADYA (*turning away*): Oh!——

SABIEN: Don't turn away—not love talk—just ordinary things.

NADYA (*beginning to laugh*): It's all so silly.

SABIEN: Don't laugh like that.

NADYA: Why not? There's nothing left to cry over.

SABIEN: It isn't much I'm asking.

NADYA (*still laughing*): No—not much.

SABIEN: Stop laughing.

NADYA: I can't.

SABIEN: May I kiss you?

NADYA: No.

SABIEN: Please!

NADYA: No, no, go away.

SABIEN: Are you afraid?

NADYA: No, I'm not afraid.

SABIEN: Tell me about your life here.

NADYA: Sabien! (*She laughs louder.*)

SABIEN: For Christ's sake, stop laughing!

NADYA: You must forgive me—it's utter hysteria—that's all.

SABIEN: Do you love me still?

NADYA: I loved the memory of you—until now——

SABIEN: Nadya! (*He tries to take her hand.*)

NADYA: Don't.

SABIEN: I don't understand—I'm bewildered. It's seeing you again suddenly—quite close.

NADYA: I'm not quite close any more—you've set me free—that's why I'm laughing.

SABIEN: Tell me what you mean—please—my brain feels horribly muddled.

NADYA: I should be grateful to you, really.

SABIEN: You must be very angry with me indeed to talk like that. I didn't really mean to force my way in on you. It was just as I said—Fate arranged it all. I wonder why?

NADYA: Don't you know?

SABIEN: No.

NADYA: It's the point of the joke.

SABIEN: How beautiful you look!

NADYA: We don't love one another nearly as much as we thought we did.

SABIEN: Don't we?

NADYA: No. The only difference is that I'm quicker at seeing it than you.

SABIEN (*bitterly*): Do go on. I'm so desperately eager to be convinced.

NADYA: Would you like a cigarette or anything?

SABIEN: No, thank you.

NADYA: Why didn't you come before?

SABIEN: Nadya!

NADYA: I'll tell you—you loved me too well.

SABIEN: Yes—all right—that's awfully logical.

NADYA: Are you beginning to see?

SABIEN (*almost lightly*): Oh, yes, perfectly.

NADYA (*weakly*): Well, then——

SABIEN: I want to kiss you.

NADYA: What's the use?—that's not the part of our love that mattered ever.

SABIEN: All right.

NADYA: Don't look so awfully unhappy, Sabien—a dead illusion is far less painful than a living one.

SABIEN: By coming here to-day—I've killed your love for me. Is that what you are trying to pretend?

NADYA: Not altogether. It must have died before, really. You see, I've had a certain amount of advantage over you by being so occupied with the country, and being Queen and everything——

SABIEN: Oh, yes. I quite understand.

NADYA: And all that gives me more room in which to see things clearly—I'm probably hurting you and I hate doing it—but you'll see that I'm right soon—honestly, you will.

SABIEN: How wonderful you are!

NADYA: Please—do you mind leaving me now?

SABIEN: Do you think I can't see through your poor darling lies? (*He suddenly catches her in his arms and kisses her.*) You love me. You love me still!—— Nadya—— (*He kisses her again, she pushes him away, her eyes are blazing.*)

NADYA: How dare you!—You're infamous!—— How dare you——!

She stands before him, beating her forehead with her clenched fist.

SABIEN: I love you—I love you!

NADYA: Oh, God! What am I to do!

She falls straight forward into his arms. SABIEN *stands motionless holding her. He closes his eyes for a*

moment and opens them again. When he speaks it is half in a whisper.

SABIEN: It's a dream—that's all it is—it's a dream.

He carries her across and lays her on a couch—after a moment she opens her eyes and looks at him.

NADYA: You *have* changed, Sabien—you're much thinner.

SABIEN: Oh, why did you ever go away from me?

NADYA: Don't be silly.

SABIEN: Are you glad I came to-day?

NADYA: Glad! Why should I be glad? All this long time I've been fighting against you—crushing down the memory of you so that I might live my life here more or less properly, without that stupid look of misery in my eyes for everyone to see. I've managed to build up a little real enthusiasm and purpose and ambition for my country! And now you come and smash it all up to nothing again. Now, when I need all the control and courage I can muster —Oh, Sabien, how could you——

SABIEN: Hasn't *my* individual Hell ever entered your thoughts?

NADYA: Yes, it has—but——

SABIEN (*bitterly*): But it doesn't matter! Is that it?

NADYA: It *mustn't* matter.

SABIEN: Damn your country! Damn it and curse it! I hate it—I——

NADYA: Don't go on like that—it's cheap.

SABIEN: Oh, forgive me—please—I didn't mean to make it all the more difficult for you, I swear I didn't.

I've kept away until I could keep away no longer. I've been here three weeks. I didn't mean you ever to know until this afternoon. When a message came saying you wanted to see me, I went mad, I giggled and shouted and cried—all by myself in my room. I thought that you'd found out somehow and wanted me—really wanted me! It wasn't till afterwards I realised that it was only the Queen wishing to bestow her tactful thanks upon a loyal subject. Then it was too late—I'd been through it all. Meeting you, perhaps first before a lot of people, and kissing your dear hand correctly and not letting anyone see—then at last being alone with you and hearing your voice again. Oh! you do understand, don't you? I couldn't go back then—I couldn't——

NADYA: No. You couldn't—possibly.

SABIEN: Nadya, do you really still love me—as you did?

NADYA: Yes.

SABIEN: Is there no escape for you—ever

NADYA: None.

SABIEN: What if there's a revolution and you're dethroned?

NADYA: I shall be exiled—with my husband. And we'll wait, holding ourselves in readiness for better days.

SABIEN (*bitterly*): Better days!

NADYA: Yes.

SABIEN: I'm going to kill myself.

NADYA: Oh, don't do that. You may forget—in time.

SABIEN: Even so, I couldn't endure waiting for that time to come.

NADYA: I shall have to endure it.

SABIEN: You *have* something. I've nothing.

NADYA (*her eyes filling with tears*): No—I suppose you haven't.

SABIEN: Not even the memory of possessing you.

NADYA: No, Sabien. Not even that.

SABIEN: I am denied you as my wife. My whole life is to be lived without you, after all my dreams and plans and hopes. Let me be your lover?

NADYA (*turning away*): No.

SABIEN: Let me be your lover—once—once only——

NADYA: Never. I'm the Queen.

SABIEN: That's heroics! You don't mean it in your heart.

NADYA: I do mean it. Listen! If I gave myself to you even once only, the spell would be broken. It's not heroics, because I *know*. The people here hate me for what I've done in the past. I'm trying to beat down their hatred and suspicion day by day, and prove to them that the past was another life, another existence, before I was born to the responsibility of reigning over them, and therefore to be forgotten, washed away—utterly.

SABIEN (*catching her hand passionately*): Nadya, I implore you!

NADYA (*dragging back*): Don't—don't implore me—help me. Try to understand—for God's sake try to understand.

SABIEN (*straining towards her*): Nadya—Nadya—no one need ever know. Let me come to you to-night!

NADYA: No—no—no!

SABIEN: You'd never see me again afterwards.

NADYA: I should know you were alive somewhere, longing for me! I should know no peace—ever.

SABIEN: I shall die to-morrow—anyhow. It's your wedding-day.

NADYA (*burying her face in her hands*): Oh, don't—don't——

SABIEN (*with sudden calmness*): It's true, Nadya darling, and it's much the best way—don't you see? Death is such a little thing compared to the unhappiness we've both of us endured. I don't mind it or fear it a bit, and I know you wouldn't either if you were me.

NADYA (*softly*): No.

SABIEN: I shall die to-morrow whatever happens—do you hear me? *Whatever* happens!

NADYA (*looking straight before her*): Yes.

He takes her in his arms and kisses her.

SABIEN (*whispering*): Say 'Yes' again.

NADYA (*with her eyes closed*): Yes!

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene I

The scene is the same as Act II; the time is about 11:30 p. m. When the curtain rises the stage is fully lighted. One of the double doors is a little open. Music can be heard playing downstairs.

Zana *enters, right, by service door. She comes across and shuts double doors firmly, then she returns to the service door and beckons.*

Sabien *enters. He is in full evening dress and a long black cloak.*

Zana: You must be very quiet.

Sabien: Like a mouse, Zana.

Zana: Wait in my room—here—— (*She goes towards her door.*)

Sabien: May I have a cigarette?

Zana: Yes, sir. (*She gives him one.*)

Sabien: It's all very strange, isn't it?

Zana: Yes, sir.

Sabien: I feel a sense of unreality, as though we were all in a dream.

Zana: Perhaps we are, sir.

Sabien: It's a strain—trying all the time not to wake up.

Zana: Yes, sir.

Sabien: Will she be very long?

ZANA: Oh, no, sir, I don't think so; it's not a ball, only a State dinner.

SABIEN: Nadya at a State dinner. (*He laughs.*) It's difficult to imagine.

ZANA: I believe Her Majesty finds them very tiring.

SABIEN: Her Majesty! I beg your pardon, Zana, I'd forgotten. That's part of the dream.

ZANA: Oh, no, sir, it's part of the waking up.

SABIEN: You're not nearly so friendly as you used to be, Zana.

ZANA: I'm sorry, sir.

SABIEN: Like a stranger.

ZANA: I don't mean to be, but——

SABIEN: But what?

ZANA: I'm frightened.

SABIEN: Of me?

ZANA: In a way, sir.

SABIEN: I suppose you think I ought never to have come.

ZANA: Yes, sir.

SABIEN: I couldn't help myself, Zana.

ZANA: No, sir.

SABIEN: Is Prince Keri in love with her?

ZANA: I don't know I'm sure, sir.

SABIEN: I suppose I ought not to have asked you.

ZANA: Everything's very different here, sir, from Paris.

SABIEN: Yes, I see that. Do you miss Paris?

ZANA: In some ways; but this is my country, I was born here.

SABIEN: I understand.

ZANA: I think Her Majesty feels like that about it, too, sir—now.

SABIEN: She was never happy here.

ZANA: That doesn't make any difference—there's always the future.

SABIEN: Not for everyone, Zana, May I take the cigarette-box in with me?

ZANA: Of course, sir. (*She hands him cigarette-box.*)

SABIEN: I'm frightfully grateful to you, Zana.

ZANA (*putting her finger to her lips*): S-shh!

SABIEN (*whispering*): I'm *frightfully* grateful to you, Zana!

ZANA: Go in quickly, someone's coming.

SABIEN *retreats into* ZANA'S *room and she closes the door after him. There is the sound of hurried footsteps in the ante-room.* MISS PHIPPS *enters. She wears a hat and coat and thick veil which she has thrown back. Her face is very agitated. She carefully shuts the doors behind her. Her whole attitude suggests portentous secrecy.*

MISS PHIPPS (*breathlessly*): Zana!

ZANA (*alarmed*): What's the matter? What's happened?

MISS PHIPPS (*in sinister tones*): Nothing's happened—yet. (*She removes her hat.*)

ZANA: Where have you been?

MISS PHIPPS: I've been in the town. (*She looks round cautiously as though afraid of prying ears and eyes.*) I dined at 'The Blue Rose.'

ZANA (*astonished*): 'The Blue Rose'!

MISS PHIPPS: All by myself.

ZANA: Miss Phipps, how *could* you!

MISS PHIPPS: I took a table just behind the door. I had this with me in case I was attacked. (*She produces a small revolver from her coat pocket.*)

ZANA: I hope you unloaded it before you went out?

MISS PHIPPS: Of course I did, but it gave me a feeling of security. Fortunately, no one noticed me except—except—one old man!

ZANA (*laughing*): Oh, Miss Phipps—fancy *you!*

MISS PHIPPS (*severely*): Don't be absurd, Zana. I went there prepared to take risks.

ZANA: What did he do?

MISS PHIPPS: He handed me an olive and called me 'dear.'

ZANA: Yes, and then?

MISS PHIPPS (*intensely*): I realised that the only thing to do was to play up, so I leant forward, flung back my veil, and said, 'You look a good sort, let's have some champagne.'

ZANA (*trying to control her laughter*): What did he do then?

MISS PHIPPS (*triumphantly*): Nothing. He walked straight out of the place.

ZANA: But, Miss Phipps, why did you go there at all?

MISS PHIPPS: I had a purpose, Zana.

ZANA: What sort of purpose?

MISS PHIPPS: To find out what was going on among the people; to discover whether or not there was going to be this dreaded revolution!

ZANA: And is there?

MISS PHIPPS: I don't know.

ZANA: Did you find anything?

MISS PHIPPS: No, nothing. But mark my words, it's all very sinister.

ZANA: But 'The Blue Rose' isn't in the least revolutionary, only thoroughly immoral!

MISS PHIPPS (*putting on her hat again*): That will do, Zana.

ZANA (*pertly*): Let me know when you have any more news!

MISS PHIPPS: I am going up to my room now. I shall not undress. If anything happens in the night, can I rely upon you to call me?

ZANA: It depends *what* happens.

MISS PHIPPS (*crossly*): Oh!

She goes out. ZANA, *still smiling, goes down left and closes the windows. There is the sound of voices in the ante-room, then* NADYA *enters, followed by* PRINCE KERI. *She is in white, and wearing, in addition to a small tiara, several orders.*

NADYA: Thank you so much for escorting me. Won't you come in and talk for a little?

KERI: No, no. I'm sure you're too tired. Also, think of to-morrow. (*He shudders and laughs.*)

NADYA: Must I?

KERI: Apropos of that, here's the programme of the day's events. I promised General Krish I'd give it to you. (*He hands her a paper.*)

NADYA: Thank you. (*She places it on the bureau.*) But I absolutely refuse to look at it. I prefer to be pushed through everything like a doll. It's less fatiguing.

KERI: So do I.

NADYA: Oh, no, you're ever so much more assertive. You manage things beautifully. Really, your speech tonight was one of the most charming exhibitions of tact I've ever heard. I only wish every soul in the country had been listening, instead of just a handful of well-fed loyalists.

KERI: Didn't you think my expression was awfully good, too? Sort of half-shy and rather boyish. I always assume that when there are a lot of old statesmen about, they love it!

NADYA. Humbug!

KERI: Of course. It's part of my equipment, as it is of yours. I watched you chatting away vivaciously, and your bread crumbling—crumbling—all over the tablecloth.

NADYA. I feel rather—rather nervy.

KERI: I'm not altogether surprised.

NADYA: Would you like a liqueur or some coffee or anything?

KERI: No, thank you.

NADYA: Cigarette?

KERI: Yes, please.

NADYA (*looking for the box*): They seem to have disappeared entirely.

KERI: Never mind.

NADYA (*ringing bell*): Zana will know.

Enter ZANA.

Where are the cigarettes, Zana?

ZANA (*blankly*): In my room, Your Majesty.

NADYA (*surprised*): In your room?

ZANA: Yes, Your Majesty I—I thought it was dangerous to leave that beautiful box lying about.

NADYA (*realising*): Oh, yes, I see. That was very thoughtful of you. Fetch them now, will you?

ZANA: Yes, Your Majesty. (*She curtseys and goes out.*)

KERI (*smiling*): Your maid seems to have an unduly suspicious mind.

NADYA: The whole atmosphere of the palace is so charged with apprehension at the moment, one can't altogether blame her.

Re-enter ZANA *with cigarette-box.*

Thank you, Zana.

ZANA *curtseys and goes out.* NADYA *offers* KERI *a cigarette and takes one herself.*

KERI: Thank you. (*He lights them both.*)

NADYA: Won't you sit down?

KERI: I'm going in a moment.

NADYA: What a dear the Duchess is!

KERI: Marvellous woman!

NADYA: She has such charm and kindness.

KERI: We're making conversation.

NADYA: I know we are.

KERI: Why?

NADYA: Uneasiness, I suppose.

KERI: If you're uneasy with me, I shall feel I'm failing you at the outset.

NADYA: Don't say that. You've given me the first real feeling of security I've had for ages.

KERI: It's sweet of you to say so.

NADYA: I wonder if your perception is just a brilliantly

superficial 'part of your equipment' or whether it goes deeper down?

KERI: Oh, *fearfully* deep!

NADYA (*seriously*): Deep enough to penetrate through what appears to be the beastliest portrayal of faith—and perhaps pardon it!

KERI *glances at her sharply and then smiles.*

KERI: I don't know in the least what you mean, but with your permission I shall always be your friend. What is it they say? 'Come weal, come woe.'

NADYA: Come weal, come woe.

KERI: Good-night. (*He kisses her hand.*)

NADYA: Good-night.

KERI *goes out.* NADYA *waits until his footsteps have died away, then she locks the door after him and calls softly:*

Zana, Zana.

ZANA *re-enters from service door.*

Is he here, Zana?

ZANA: Yes, Madame. In my room.

NADYA: Quick then—the table.

ZANA: Yes, Madame.

She goes out and returns immediately wheeling the trolley-table, which is crowded with supper-things. NADYA *opens a little card-table, left, and they lay it together, talking in whispers.*

NADYA: Is Miss Phipps in bed?

ZANA: Yes, Madame. She came in a moment ago.

NADYA: Was he waiting there by the little door when you went down?

ZANA: Yes, Madame, he'd been there for half an hour.

NADYA: Don't you think that—that he looks ill, Zana?

ZANA: Not exactly ill, Madame; kind of different.

NADYA (*pausing with a pot of caviar in her hand*): Different! I suppose I look different, too. (*She puts it down.*) I'm glad I remembered this.

ZANA *produces a vase of orchids.*

ZANA: I brought you these, Madame, they looked so lovely.

NADYA: Oh, Zana, thank you. You don't forget things either.

ZANA: It seems like old times to-night, somehow.

NADYA: Yes, it does.

ZANA: I'll put the champagne on the ice here—by his chair.

NADYA: That's right.

ZANA: It's all ready now, I think,

NADYA: Yes, I think so, too.

They both survey the table critically, then ZANA *wheels the trolley-table out of the service door and returns at once.*

ZANA: There's nothing more, Madame?

NADYA: Nothing more. You have the key of the little door?

ZANA: Yes, Madame. Here. (*She taps her pocket.*) Quite safe.

NADYA: Good-night, Zana, dear.

ZANA: Good night, Madame.

She curtseys and goes out. NADYA *stands silent for a moment, then she moves over and looks in the mirror, right. Then she raps gently on* ZANA'S *door.*

NADYA (*softly*): Sabien—please come out.

SABIEN *enters. First he bends over her hands, then he takes her in his arms and they stand together for a moment, clinging to one another.*

Let me go, dear. I want to look at you. You're so smart and sleek, just like you used to be.

SABIEN: Do you recognise these? (*He points to the studs in his shirt front.*)

NADYA: Of course. And here—do you remember these? (*She points to her ear-rings.*)

SABIEN: What's happened to the ruby ones?

NADYA: I have them still, but I don't often wear them. They're very heavy.

SABIEN (*admiringly*): What a wonderful dress!

NADYA: It is nice, isn't it?

SABIEN (*smiling rather wistfully*): So stately and appropriate. Do you remember that flame-coloured one?

NADYA: Yes; but, you know, I never wore it much after that dreadful night at the Cabaret d'Alicante.

SABIEN (*laughing*): Wasn't it appalling? Poor Suzanne!

NADYA: Where is Suzanne now?

SABIEN: I haven't seen her for months. She married Maurice in the end.

NADYA: I always said she would.

SABIEN: They fight like devils.

NADYA: They never did anything else. Sit down and let's have supper now. It's only cold food, of course, but it's been chosen with the most scrupulous care. (*She sits down.*) I ate scarcely anything at dinner on purpose to keep hungry for this.

SABIEN (*sitting down*): Caviar—marvellous!

NADYA: Open the champagne, there's a darling—it's just by you.

SABIEN: All right. (*He opens bottle and pours it out.*)

NADYA: Now tell me all about yourself, and what you've been doing. Not sad things.

SABIEN: I can't think of anything not sad since you went away.

NADYA (*after a little pause*): Either can I. Isn't it silly of us to mind so much? Give me some toast.

SABIEN: Here. (*He hands her toast.*) It isn't really. It proves that all the things we said to one another were true.

NADYA: A bitter way of proving them.

SABIEN: Yes, but I think I'd even rather it was like it is than a cheap shallow little affair. A few fireworks, violent reconciliations, and then finish!

NADYA: Like Lucy Griffin and Sirio Marson.

SABIEN: And Julian and Maud.

NADYA: Dear old fat Maud—she *was* fun, wasn't she?

SABIEN: Particularly when a little gay on Chianti. She *loved* Chianti.

NADYA: What ages and ages ago it seems!

SABIEN: Give me your hand; the left one will do. I'll leave you the right to eat with. (*He takes her hand.*) It feels now as though we'd never been parted.

NADYA: It does, doesn't it? Let's pretend that this is the first night of our marriage and that everything's ordinary and safe.

SABIEN: We'll try, but it's awfully difficult. The truth

is so big and domineering, it keeps forcing its way in on us all the time.

NADYA: There is no truth except that we're together again, loving one another so—so desperately.

She almost breaks down, but controls herself. There is a slight pause. SABIEN *holds up his glass to her.*

SABIEN: Nadya!

NADYA: No, don't drink to me—it's—it's unlucky.

SABIEN (*lightly*): Yes, perhaps it is.

NADYA (*gaily*): Let's go on reminiscing about Paris. Where's Julie now?

SABIEN: Same old studio. She and Madeleine are together again, sharing, having made up their row.

NADYA: *What* a row, too! I shall never forget it. (NADYA *laughs.*)

SABIEN: Nor shall I. (*He laughs, too, hectically.*)

NADYA: And when the old Scotsman came up from downstairs and said, 'Taissez vous—taissez vous.'

SABIEN: In that *appalling* dressing-gown and worse accent——

They both go on laughing, looking at one another. Then the laughter dies away.

NADYA (*gently*): I'm afraid it's no use—this pretended laughter. It sounds so hollow and unconvincing. Don't let's try any more.

SABIEN: No, we won't.

There's another pause.

NADYA: What did you do when you got my note—saying good-bye?

SABIEN: At first I thought it was a joke, and I went on

believing that—or trying to—for as long as I could. Though in my heart I knew. Then I went to your flat, but the concierge wouldn't let me in, so I climbed up from Suzanne's—that little balcony at the back—and I stayed there all day among the litter of things you'd left behind. After that everything sort of—— Oh, I don't know. (*He bows his head.*)

NADYA: It was an extraordinary feeling—that journey away from you, leaving suddenly, with all the plans for the future—which a few hours ago had seemed so secure—shattered behind me—nothing left at all. As the train moved out of the station I willed myself to you. I made believe I was kissing you—I willed and willed and willed—clenching my hands and closing my eyes until the tears forced them open again. (*She passes the back of her hand across her eyes.*) People have written lovely things about tears being beautiful and like pearls, but they're wrong Real tears are ugly and hopeless.

SABIEN: Yes, ugly and hopeless. (*He looks up.*) Oh, Nadya, I do wish Fate hadn't played marionettes with us. It's such utter, utter agony—and so unkind!

They sit quite still staring at one another.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

When the curtain rises the stage is in darkness. The telephone suddenly rings. It continues for a moment or two and then stops. A clock strikes four. After the notes have died away there is the sound of a key being turned in the lock of the double doors leading to the ante-room. GENERAL KRISH *and* PRINCE KERI *enter.* KRISH *switches on the lights. They speak in whispers.*

KRISH: What's the time now?

KERI: Four o'clock. I heard the chimes as we came along the corridor.

KRISH: It will be dawn soon—thank God!

KERI: Daylight is wonderfully comforting, isn't it?

KRISH (*going to the window and peeping through the curtains*): The Square is absolutely silent—not a soul anywhere.

KERI: Good!

KRISH: A little too silent, if anything.

KERI: You mustn't be over-imaginative. It's so bad for the nerves.

KRISH: My nerves are all right.

KERI: Mine aren't; suspense always makes me jumpy.

KRISH: We shall know within an hour—one way or another.

KERI: I'm not going to enjoy that hour very much.

KRISH: What the devil is Myrtais doing?

KERI: Exactly what we are, I expect—palpitating.

KRISH (*crossly*): All this damned waiting about!

KERI: You told him to telephone through here—at the first sign?

KRISH: Yes.

KERI: Wouldn't it be wiser to wake Her Majesty now? It would give her more time to prepare herself.

KRISH: No, it's quite possible that nothing will happen at all. I don't want to worry her unnecessarily.

KERI: Perhaps you're right. S-ssh—what's that?

KRISH: What!

KERI (*going to the window*): I thought I heard a noise in the Square.

KRISH: Don't pull the curtains aside.

KERI: All right. (*He peeps through.*)

KRISH: Well?

KERI: Still deserted.

KRISH: Damn!

KERI: I can't see very well.

The service door opens and ZANA *enters. She gives a frightened cry on seeing them.*

KRISH (*catching her arm*): S-ssh—be quiet!

ZANA: What's happening? What's the matter?

KRISH: Nothing yet. We don't intend to disturb Her Majesty unless it's absolutely necessary.

ZANA (*with a scared look towards the bedroom door*): I understand.

KRISH: We're waiting for a telephone message from

Captain Myrtais. He has orders to ring through here at the first sign of trouble.

ZANA: Have the people risen?

KRISH: No, not yet.

ZANA (*with another glance towards the door*): Oh, my God! What am I to do?

KRISH (*sharply*): What do you mean?

ZANA: Nothing—nothing. I'm frightened.

KERI: You mustn't be frightened, we'll see that you escape all right.

ZANA: It isn't that—it's—it's—— (*She bursts into tears.*)

KERI (*patting her shoulder*): Come now, you really must control yourself.

ZANA: I'm sorry, Your Highness, I—I'll try.

KRISH: That's right. Here, drink some of this. (*He pours her out some water and gives it to her.*)

ZANA: Thank you, sir. (*She sips it.*)

KRISH: Now go back to your room like a good girl.

ZANA (*wildly*): No, no—let me stay here—you must let me stay here.

KERI: We'll let you know the moment anything happens —if anything does, which is extremely unlikely.

ZANA: Let me stay, please—please let me stay.

KRISH: Go to your own room, Zana.

ZANA: No, no, no.

KRISH: S-ssh! What in Heaven's name is the matter with you?

ZANA (*clutching his sleeves*): Please—please let me stay here. I won't make a sound.

KERI: You'd better let her, General, she'll have hysterics if you don't.

KRISH: Here you are then. (*He pushes her into a chair.*) Keep quiet and don't say a word.

KERI: I shall sit down, too, I'm sick of going about like an animal in a cage. (*He sits down.*)

KRISH: Have you got a cigarette on you?

KERI: No. Here are some. (*He hands him the box.*)

KRISH: There are only three left. (*He takes one.*)

KERI (*also taking one*): Her Majesty smokes far too much; it was half full this evening.

KRISH (*lighting them*): Here.

KERI: Thanks.

The three of them sit in silence for a moment.

KRISH (*irritably*): Damnation!

KERI: I beg your pardon.

KRISH: I said damnation.

KERI: Quite.

There is another silence.

Even this is preferable to the usual pre-marriage bachelor dinner.

KRISH: What?

KERI: I can't say it all over again; it wasn't very amusing.

KRISH: Good.

Another silence.

KERI: These cigarettes are delicious.

KRISH (*gruffly*): Excellent.

KERI: Not too mild.

KRISH: No.

KERI: Not too strong either.

KRISH: No.

KERI: I don't like strong cigarettes.

KRISH: No.

KERI: So bad for my voice.

Another silence. Very gradually the lights begin to dim.

ZANA: The lights—what's happening to the lights?

KRISH: S-ssh! Keep quiet.

The lights slowly go down, then with a final flicker go out altogether.

KERI: That's bad.

KRISH: It's definite, anyhow. They've got the power station.

KERI: What's happened to Myrtais?

KRISH: God knows.

KERI: You'd better ring through to him.

At this moment the telephone rings. ZANA *gives a cry.*

KRISH: At last! (*He snatches up the telephone.*) Hello, hello—yes—speaking.—What?—I can't hear. . . . I can't hear. . . . Speak louder, man. . . . Hello . . . hello. . . . Damn!

KERI: What's happened?

KRISH: It's gone dead. They must have cut the wire.

KERI: Surely it's a house telephone—no one could get at it.

KRISH (*he goes over and pulls the curtains back. The room becomes filled with a rather cold grey light of very early morning*): Good God!

KERI: What is it?

KRISH: Look!

KERI: What does it mean? How did they get there so quickly?

KRISH: They're waiting for a signal. Wake the Queen at once.

ZANA: No, no.

KRISH: Wake Her Majesty immediately—there's not a moment to be lost.

ZANA: I—I—I—I can't, sir. I——

KRISH: What do you mean? Why can't you?

ZANA: I—I——

KRISH (*dragging her to the window*): Here, look!

ZANA: What am I to do? What am I to do?

KRISH: What I tell you.

KERI: I'll wake her. (*He goes toward the door.*)

ZANA (*pulling him out of the way*): No, no, I will. Let me. (*She bangs on the door with her fists. She is half sobbing with fear.*)

KRISH (*catching her by the shoulder*): Go in and wake her. What do you mean by banging the door like that?

ZANA (*desperately*): No, no!

KRISH: The girl's mad. (*He tries to pull her aside.*) Here, let me come—let me come at once.

ZANA (*with her back against the door*): No, you can't.—Go away.—Go into the ante-room. I'll tell her. I'll see that she escapes. It'll frighten her to see you both here. Go into the ante-room, please. Please go into the ante-room.

KRISH (*angrily*): Come away from that door and don't be a fool!

He drags her away. She screams. He is about to enter when KERI *touches his arm.*

KERI: Wait! Wait!

There is silence for a moment, broken only by ZANA'S *sobs and the steady murmur of the approaching mob. Suddenly the bedroom door opens and* NADYA *appears. She comes slowly into the room. She has thrown a light wrap over her nightgown.*

NADYA: What is it? What do you want?

KRISH: We want you to dress as quickly as possible and leave the palace with your maid. Captain Vignard will meet you downstairs and escort you through the gardens. There is a car waiting just inside the gates by the boat-house.

NADYA: I don't understand. I suppose I'm sleepy still. I don't understand.

KERI: The people have risen—all the scum of the town——

KRISH: Nadya, for God's sake, pull yourself together!

KERI: You must escape. Put on some clothes quickly.

NADYA: I don't want to escape.

KERI (*sharply*): That's foolish. Do what we tell you!

NADYA *looks at him queerly for a moment and then turns to* ZANA.

NADYA: Stop crying, Zana!

KRISH: If you stay here it may mean your death.

NADYA: After all the trouble you took in wresting me away from my own life. What a pity!

ZANA (*catching her hand*): Listen to them, Madame—they're right. Listen to them!

NADYA (*gently*): Go to your room at once, Zana, and dress yourself.

ZANA (*trying to control her hysteria*): Yes, Madame. (*She goes out.*)

KRISH: What are you waiting for? Every moment is precious.

NADYA: I've already told you. I'm not going to escape. I'm not afraid.

KERI: It isn't a question of being afriad. Your life is of value—you're the Queen.

NADYA: Of value. (*She laughs.*) Thank you.

KERI: What do you mean? Why in Heaven's name are you behaving like this?

NADYA (*ignoring him*): Krish, will you go and tell Miss Phipps to prepare to go at once? Her room is the last along that passage. (*She points to service door.*)

KRISH: Nadya——?

NADYA: Please go.

KRISH *looks undecidedly at* KERI, *who nods.* NADYA *sees him.*

I'm grateful to you for humouring me. Krish?

KRISH *goes out.* NADYA *walks over to the window.*

KERI: Please don't go too near that window.

NADYA (*stops and turns*): Don't be so agitated for me—it doesn't matter.

KERI: This afternoon you were clear-sighted and sensible and quite splendid over everything. What's changed you now?

NADYA: Just the end of everything.

KERI: This is neither heroism nor courage, it's sheer

selfishness. Just because you're unhappy and don't care what happens you're being quite consciously brave, and it's despicable.

NADYA: You come here asking me to escape. Let me tell you something. I am the cause of this—the sole cause. I've done no good *anywhere*. Don't you see that? Failure after failure all through my life, ending in this supreme one. You don't suppose I'm going to run away now?

KERI: You dedicated your life to Krayia a year ago when you were crowned Queen, and it is breaking faith to allow your private sorrows to interfere in a moment like this. If you escape now it won't be from the Krayian people—the *real* people. It will only be from a horde of senseless rabble scraped up from the gutter. In a few weeks it will probably all be over and you will be needed —*badly !* Listen to me—don't turn away—listen——

NADYA: Keri, forgive me, but I can't escape.

Re-enters KRISH *hurriedly, followed by* MISS PHIPPS. *She is dressed and quite calm, and carrying a small attaché case. She goes straight over and unlocks the bureau, from which she takes several bundles of papers, letters, etc., and stuffs them in the case.*

KRISH (*gently to* NADYA): Please, we shouldn't advise flight unless it was absolutely necessary.

NADYA: It's urgent—I quite see. Miss Phipps, please go at once. (*She calls.*) Zana—Zana——

MISS PHIPPS (*with conscious calmness*): I have all the important letters; don't worry, they're quite safe.

ZANA *enters, more or less dressed.*

NADYA: Zana, go with Miss Phipps. Captain Vignard is waiting downstairs.

ZANA: But, Madame, aren't you coming?

NADYA: No.

ZANA: I won't then—not without you!

KERI (*irritable*): Oh, God, all this deathless heroism!

KRISH: Do what you're told, Zana.

NADYA: Zana, I may come afterwards. Go at once.

ZANA (*retreating into a corner*): I won't go—I mean it—I won't!

KRISH: You see, Nadya, you're imperilling other lives as well as your own by this obstinacy.

NADYA: Thank you, Zana, I'd like you to stay. Miss Phipps, please go.

MISS PHIPPS: Yes, Your Majesty. Good-bye! (*She curtseys and goes out.*)

KERI (*lighting a cigarette*): I'm afraid we're at an *impasse.*

KRISH: It's getting lighter.

KERI: You're utterly miserable—you're hating this!

NADYA (*defiantly*): I don't care—any more.

KERI: That's just pretending. You *do.*

A stone crashes through the window at NADYA's feet. *She gives a little cry. There is a violent howl from outside.*

NADYA (*suddenly furious, through clenched teeth*): You're quite right—I *do!* (*She picks up the stone, and before either* KRISH *or* KERI *can prevent her she rushes up the three steps and tears open the windows wide.*)

KRISH (*darting forward*): My God! Nadya!

There is a fresh yell on her appearance. Then with all her force she hurls the stone into the crowd. There is a loud cry of pain and then absolute silence.

NADYA (*contemptuously*): You idiots! You absolute idiots!

Someone in the crowd laughs hysterically. ZANA *shrieks and hides her face.*

Here I am entirely at your mercy. Please shoot or do something definite.

There is a pause. Someone shouts something unintelligible, then silence again.

You are not very spirited, are you? Where are your leaders —hiding away in the shadows? Tell them to come out and give an account of themselves.

Another pause.

Perhaps you are being fair-minded. Perhaps this silence is to give me a chance to plead my cause; to say something in my own defence. If so, you are generous, but very, very foolish. I might lure you away from your grievances, play upon your sentimentality, win you over to my side a little if only I had the courage. I could lie to you from this balcony just as effectively as your agitators have lied to you in the public parks and taverns, but it would only muddle and confuse you more than ever, and I am too tired and too bitterly angry to make the effort. You have failed me utterly all along the line. You are even failing me now by being so chicken-hearted and indefinite. I expected to find the people of Krayia faithful to their ideals and secure in their convictions. I found neither ideals nor convictions. Nothing but discontent, resentment, and dis-

loyalty. I have given up so much for you, now you can do a small service for me. I don't want to live any longer. Here is the chance you have been waiting for, if only you have the courage to take it. For a whole year, ever since I came to the throne, you have been boiling up for this hour, this supreme moment. The Queen standing before you alone, a target to be shot at, to die without ceremony or prayers or dignity. Shoot now and see what happens. I will die so quickly for you. You needn't be afraid of the sight of blood, there won't be any, only sawdust. I will just crumple up, humiliated and grotesque, like a rag doll.

KERI *walks negligently up and stands by her side; he is still smoking. There is a murmur from the crowd.* Go in—go in! Not you, too—it isn't worth it! (*With a catch in her voice.*) Oh, what a silly, silly revolution!

KERI (*gently*): Why don't you all go home to bed?

There is a sort of laugh at this, then someone starts singing the National Anthem. It is quickly taken up by the rest. NADYA *turns away wearily and leans against the window.* KERI *comes in, and turning at the foot of the steps, waits for her. A first ray of sunlight suddenly shines on to her face, she puts up her arm to shield her eyes. The National Anthem continues rather disjointedly as the people are moving away.*

NADYA (*wearily*): I'm too tired for any more now, but remember one thing—afterwards. I ask you, humbly, in the name of your own dear heart's desire—to forgive me. . . .

KERI: Forgive you? I don't understand.

KRISH *and* ZANA *rush off into bedroom—after a mo-*

ment KRISH *returns. There is the sound of a shot from the bedroom.* NADYA *puts her hand to her mouth for an instant as though to prevent herself from screaming. Then she bows her head.*

KRISH (*in doorway*): Your Majesty, a man has been shot trying to get in at your window. Do you see? A man has been shot trying to get in at your window.

KERI *sinks on one knee and kisses her hand.*

NADYA: Now you understand.

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